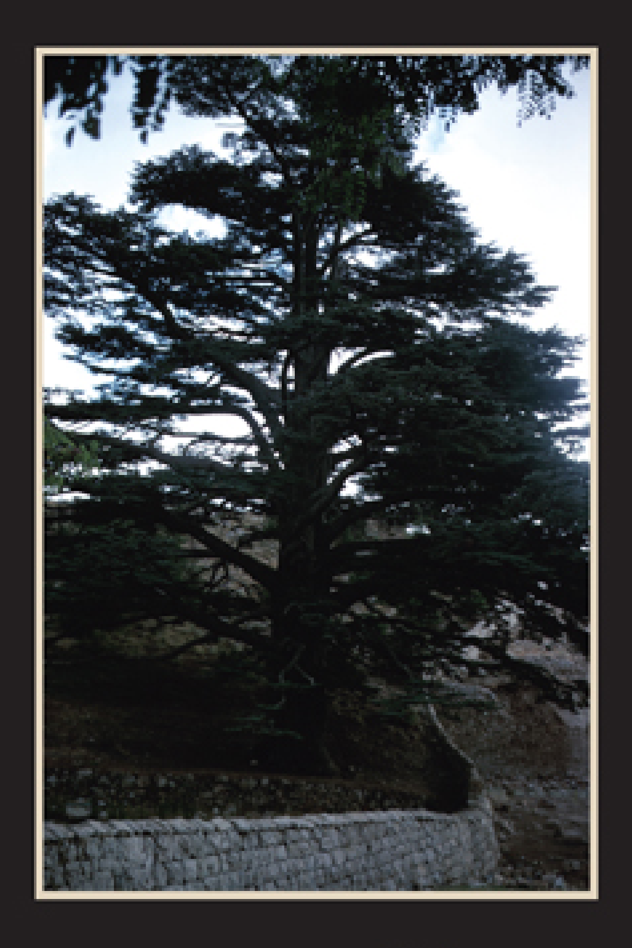
Franck Salameh



Language, Memory, and Identity in the Middle East

The Case for Lebanon

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Introduction

It has become almost axiomatic in our times that the Middle East be viewed as the world's quintessence of perpetual bloodshed and ethnoreligious turmoil. It has also become de rigueur for experts to attribute the region's proverbial volatility to a slew of reasons ranging from sociopolitical ills, to ideological and religious divergences, to colonialism, Western meddling, absence of freedoms, and the (obligatory) Arab-Israeli conflict. Also cited as popular justifications for the Middle East's predicaments are the persistence of tribalism, and a clash between traditional loyalties and rapid leaps toward modernity interspersed by relapses into the past—often fraught with snags leading to vicious cycles of violence, coups, internecine wars, massacres, and large scale migrations and population movements. At least, these are some of the major—academically sanctioned—culprits and catalysts in the modern Middle East's malaise as articulated by the region's dominant political discourse of the twentieth century.

Language Memory and Identity in the Middle East: The Case for Lebanon, proposes a new reading of modern Middle Eastern history, with the aim of casting an alternative look at the region, considering other possible root causes lurking behind the antagonisms plaguing it, and suggesting alternate solutions. Where this work should hope to differ from traditional Middle East scholarship is in its reevaluation of the very image that specialists—and Middle Easterners alike—have normalized and intellectualized about their area, often with a patronizing refusal to attribute its pathologies to causes outside the traditional—oft-visited and overused—Arabist, Arab-Israeli, and postcolonial paradigms.

The aim of this new outlook is not in any way to diminish traditional scholarship on the Middle East. Rather, it is to reveal "another" Middle East, long eluded by established academic models, and ignored by received wisdom and fashionable causes célèbres. Certainly the Arab-Israeli conflict has been a major feature of modern Middle Eastern history, as has Western involvement ratcheted up regional rivalries and poured gunpowder over the Middle East's political fireworks. But the Arab-Israeli conflict is a symptom, not a cause of the Middle East's ills, as are Islamist grievances, Palestinian dispossession, Western involvement, and the current wars in Iraq and Afghanistan only manifestations of other deep-seated, indigenous problems.

To begin with, a corrective to the semantics commonly used in reference to the Middle East can certainly lead to more clarity about the region. For one, the Middle East is not—and should not be viewed as—the "Arab World" or the exclusive preserve of Arabs and Muslims alone. Despite many religious, cultural, and linguistic similarities among Middle Easterners, both the modern and ancient Middle East exhibit no uniformity, unity, or continuity in their cultural, ethnic, or linguistic attributes to warrant the monolithic appellation "Arab World." At the very least, Middle Eastern cultures exhibit no uniformity and cultural cohesiveness to the same extent as, say, Indian or Chinese cultures do, and therefore possess no valid historical, ethnic, or cultural bases with which to justify suppressing the region's inherent diversity and multiplicity of ethnicities, cultures, and languages to the benefit of one curt, soothing label.[1] On this point, the Brill *Encyclopedia of Arabic Language and Linguistics* notes that:

> Before the movement of Arabs out of Arabia and across the Levant, Mesopotamia, and North Africa, the area now [misleadingly] called the "Arab world" had hosted many other cultures, including the Sumerians, Babylonians, Assyrians, Phoenicians, Ancient Egyptians, Persians, Greeks, and Romans. [. . .] *The legacies of these [pre-Arab] pre-Islamic peoples and cultures did not all simply disappear with the advent of the Muslim Arabs*.[2]

As regards the presumed exclusivity and predominance of the Arabic language as the principal national and cultural tool of the entire Middle East, the Brill *Encyclopedia* casts further doubt on the presumptions of Arab dominance and homogeneity, noting that:

> If the Arab invasions are viewed as a flood arising in Arabia and engulfing the regions from Spain to the Indus, then in parts of these regions the floodwaters bearing Arabic and Islam seem to have [. . .] not covered [all the Near East . . .]. Some peoples of the region resisted the forces of Arabicization, Islamicization, or both; even among those who underwent both these processes, this was not always accompanied by a total abandonment of their

> earlier culture. Thus, there are still pockets across the [so-called] Arab world using languages other than Arabic and practicing religions other than Islam, *and there are still groups convinced that their ancestors belonged to a people different from those of their neighbors* [that is, different from the Arab peoples].[3]

Indeed, there had never been a united "Arab world" or a cohesive "Arab nation" antecedent to the modern twentieth-century Middle Eastern state system—which modern Islamists and Arab nationalists never tire of assailing and berating as "artificial." Even Arabian users of countless varieties of the Arabic language, that is, Arabs of the Arabian Peninsula prior to the seventh-century Muslim conquest of the Levant and the Fertile Crescent, were never a coherent cohesive lot with a unified corporate identity and a single national language. Instead, pre-Islamic Arabs were at best a bevy of fractious warring tribes, rival "city-states," and opposed families and clans using a multiplicity of idioms and languages that bore little resemblance to what later became the language of Quran, and what is today referred to as Modern Standard Arabic (MSA). Of course, much has been said about the Prophet Muhammad, the founder of Islam, having integrated those wayward and disjointed peoples into a united *Umma*, or community, during the seventh century. In reality however, Islam, like its Persian, Greek, Roman, and Byzantine predecessors, simply introduced another imperial order, another central authority, and another administrative language to a Middle East (and an Arabian Peninsula) that continued to be characterized by varied smaller local, ethnic, cultural, and tribal loyalties.[4] And at any rate, the Prophet Muhammad did not so much unite the Arabs into a single nation as he turned them into Muslims. The *Umma* or nation in question is, therefore, an Islamic, not an Arab *Umma*.

Even the celebrated T. E. Lawrence (Lawrence of Arabia), one of the twentieth century's most committed advocates of Arabism, scoffed at the idea of an "Arab nation" and a putative cohesive "Arab people" as such, calling the Arabs themselves "a manufactured people."[5] Lawrence described Arab unity as an illusion, akin to "English-speaking unity [. . .]; a madman's notion—for this [twentieth] century or [the] next."[6] He even conceded the Arabic language itself—the supposed nimbus and cement of Arabness—to have gained primacy in the Middle East *only* recently, and *only* by sheer "accident and time," asserting that its linguistic dominance did "not mean that Syria—any more than Egypt—[was] an Arabian country," and further adding that on the Mediterranean "sea coast there [was] little, if any, Arabic feeling or tradition."[7] Indeed, a number of Middle East specialists admit this idea of an ostensibly cohesive and coherent "Arab nation" to be a Western caricature of a Western concept of identity that was never extant in the Middle East; one that, nevertheless, modern Arab nationalists pilfered and accepted wholly, never questioning its validity

and suitability to a region distinguished by its millenarian variety and diversity.[8] Joel Carmichael wrote that this notion of an Arabic-speaking "Arab" nation represented the triumph of a Western, not an Eastern, nor even an Arab conception of identity:

> It was in fact the Western habit of referring to Arabic-speaking Muslims [. . .] as "Arabs" because of their language—on the analogy of German-speakers as Germans, French-speakers as French and so on—that imposed itself on an East that had never regarded language as a basic social classifier. It was natural for Europeans to use the word "Arab" about a Muslim [. . .] whose native language was Arabic; they were quite indifferent to the principles of classification in the East. The oddity is simply that this European habit became the very germ that the contemporary Arab nationalist movement has sprung from.[9]

Therefore, dealing with the modern Middle East as a single homogenous Arab cultural mass, and viewing its problems—and attempting to resolve them—through the prism of its most fashionable narrative (the Arabist one), its most celebrated political snarl (the Arab-Israeli conflict), or its dominant linguistic group (the users of Arabic) is simplistic, misleading, and ultimately false. To most Western students of the Middle East, Englishmen, Scotsmen, Irishmen, Canadians, and Nigerians, despite natively speaking the same language—English—are never subsumed as members of the same (English) nation. Yet by virtue of making use of the Arabic language (or some form thereof), those same Western students of the Middle East think nothing of assuming all "Arabophones" to be Arabs, defective and spurious as this notion might be in a European context. Why is this so? Because the West's spatial, perceptual, and cultural distance from the Middle East tends to rarefy the region and cast it into a single pleasingly uniform cultural, ethnic, and linguistic mass, presuming all its problems to be exclusively those of Muslims and Arabs—usually provoked by outsiders, often Western outsiders driven by colonial greed and "Orientalist" rapacity.

The West certainly bears some of the blame for the Middle East's ills, for Western powers do choose Middle Eastern allies and do interfere in local disputes. But it remains that the Middle East's problems, in spite of troublesome Western intrusions, are largely the result of local pathologies borne by local pathogens and begotten by local actors making local decisions and pursuing local interests.[10] It is foolhardy—not to mention condescending of Middle Easterners themselves—to accept and intellectualize the notion that the people of the Middle East are somehow mere spectators in their own lives' tragedies, hapless victims and eternal preys to Western manipulation and machination, and unwilling subalterns as it were, in a cabal concocted by outsiders. Indeed, if the West is at all

guilty of any misconduct in the Middle East, it must be the Western intellectual elites' refusal to assign responsibility for the Arabs' pathos, even if only partially, to the Arabs themselves. The possibility that Arabs and Muslims *are* indeed masters of their own fate, proficient at cracking their whips at their own and authoring the very despotism, brutalities, and afflictions rained in on their own peoples—without the benefit of Western assistance or Western interference—are notions almost never entertained by Arabs and their Western defenders.[11] Yet, in the late 1990s, in a decidedly rare and fleeting moment of objective clarity and candor, Edward Said no less, an otherwise jarring critic of the West and one of the most eloquent authors of this notion that Arabs and Muslims are eternal victims of the West, even *he* began casting doubt over illusions that he had helped shape and intellectualize during the 1970s. The Arab's self-pity and victimhood, which Said helped turn into an exquisite art form with the 1979 publication of his book *Orientalism,* had morphed into rigorous introspection and self-criticism in a 1998 essay he penned for Le Monde Diplomatique. Said wrote then, that:

> The history of the modern Arab world—with all its political failures, its human rights abuses, its stunning military incompetence, its decreasing production, the fact that alone of all modern peoples, we [the Arabs] have receded in democratic and technological and scientific development—is disfigured by a whole series of outmoded and discredited ideas [. . . that are] acquiring too much—far too much—currency. [This] discredits us more than we already are discredited in the world's eyes for our incompetence, our failure to fight a decent battle, our radical misunderstanding of history and the world we live in. Why don't we fight harder for freedom of opinions in our own societies, a freedom, no one needs to be told, that scarcely exists?[12]

In the larger context of Said's work on the Middle East, the preceding fragment is a stunning departure from his customary bluster and merciless impeachment of the West on account of its ostensible abuse of Arabs and Muslims. Having made a career out of clobbering into self-imposed mutism any critic—or critique—of Arab or Muslim societies, Edward Said's *Orientalism*, a "work of malignant charlatanry" as one Orientalist recently described it, had accused the West and the academic discipline of Orientalism—and Middle East Studies by association—of being anti-Arab, anti-Muslim, and an accomplice of Western colonialism.[13] With Said, pointing out the unflattering aspects of Muslim and Arab societies, even alluding to the existence of an historical Arab and Muslim—that is an "Oriental"—imperialism, had become a form of racism.[14] Yet, in this 1998 essay Said seemed to have begun moving away from fallacies and mental clichés he had initially helped perpetuate, taking the Arabs to task and challenging them to take stock of their own inadequacies without

relying on the traditional comforting diatribes against the West for deficiencies Arab and Middle Eastern.

Still, Edward Said fell short of identifying the real barriers that stood between the Arabs and modernity, freedom, reconciliation, and an honest recognition of the Middle East's inherent diversity. He shied away from indicting the arbitrary power of the Arabic language and the cultural sterility and political despotism that it engendered. Like other Arab and Arabist intellectuals seeking remedies to the Arabs' malaise, Said scratched the surface only to stay there; his pungent attacks taking pot-shots at the symptoms of the Arabs' failures, not striking at their real causes—which, as this work will demonstrate, emanate from the Arabic language itself, its Arab nationalist votaries, and the linguistic and cultural homogeneity that they demand of Arabophones.

This work will demonstrate (and we shall see that Edward Said himself will soon echo the sentiment) that Arabic is a dead language and a conveyor of dead ideas.[15] It is not so much a mode of communication as it is an end in and of itself; "a great writer [in Arabic] is not measured by the worth of what he [says] but by his mastery of the language [he uses . . .]. The [Arabic] language—its nuances, its rhythm—[are] an instrument of entertainment rather than a medium for transmitting thought and information."[16] Yet, for all its traditionalism and regimentation, most Arabists and Arab intellectuals, most of whom displaying at best a clumsy command of the Arabic language, still remain besotted and beholden in blissful servitude to it.

While he admitted to the nebulous nature of the Arabic language, Edward Said never explicitly called for its reformation, nor for its replacement by what he termed the "much faster, clipped and more elegant" dialects. Yet, in his later years, Said described Arabic *not* as a uniform spoken idiom—presumed to be comprehensible to all members of the Arab nation, and to be a vector of a unified Arab culture—rather, he saw Arabic as a "language family" and a multitude of mutually unintelligible speech forms:

> var[ying] considerably between one region or country and another. The written language is quite different [from the spoken languages . . .] I grew up in a family whose spoken language was an amalgam of what was commonly spoken in Palestine, Lebanon and Syria. [. . .] But because I went to school in Cairo and spent most of my early youth there I also was fluent in [the Cairene] colloquial, a much faster, clipped and more elegant dialect than any of the others. [. . . But] if I were to try to understand an Algerian I would get more or less nowhere, so different and widely varied are the colloquials from each other once one gets away from the shores of the Eastern Mediterranean. The same would be true for me with an Iraqi, Moroccan, or even a deep Gulf dialect. [. . .] *The reason for that is that classical Arabic [is] like*

> *Latin for the European colloquial languages.* [. . .] So in effect then, an educated person has two quite distinct linguistic personae. Thus "what do you want?" in Lebanese or Palestinian is, when addressed to a man [. . .] "shoo bidak?" In classical [Arabic] it would be "madha to reed?" [. . .] Yet I have only known one person who actually spoke classical Arabic all the time, a Palestinian political scientist and politician whom my children used to describe as "the man who speaks like a book." [. . .] *Classical Arabic was taught in my schools, of course, but it remained of the order of a local equivalent of Latin, i.e. a dead and forbidding language.*[17]

Outside of the affected reverence with which Said treated the Arabic language in the remainder of the Al-Ahram Weekly essay—from which the passage above is excerpted—he did muster the requisite intellectual courage to recognize the wide divide separating Classical (or Modern Standard) Arabic and the other speech forms of the Middle East that are collectively and spuriously labeled as dialects. Said was unequivocal in his admission that Modern Standard and Classical Arabic were as distinct from the spoken languages of the Middle East as Latin was distinct from "the European colloquial languages"—that is, from French, Spanish, Italian and the rest. What his article went to great pains avoiding, however, was an explicit recognition of the cultural autarchy demanded by MSA and a clear advocacy on behalf of the spoken "dialects;" a reluctance evincing a willing servitude to Classical/Standard Arabic, which nevertheless, in Said's words, remained a "dead and forbidding [Latin] language" that nobody spoke—but a language still worth preserving and privileging to the detriment of vernacular speech forms.

This book proposes the idea that language, more specifically the Arabic language, in its Classical and Modern Standard forms, is a key factor in the Middle East's turbulence, authoritarianism, intellectual torpor, cultural rigidity, and lack of freedoms. Arabic, as argued Palestinian-American novelist Fawaz Turki, is a stern, arcane, highly ordered "dead language," not natively spoken by any member of the presumed Arab nation, leaving those associated with it mute and incapable of authentic, intimate, and uninhibited discourse. In this sense, claimed Turki, the Arabic language enforces imperious, coerced, absolutist "pan" conceptions of identity—whether of the pan-Islamic or pan-Arab varieties—and it inhibits Middle Easterners from reconciling themselves to the reality and finality of their region's multiple identities as expressed in a variety of "state nationalisms." Therefore, continued Turki, by way of linguistic bondage, the Arabic language holds its practitioners in blissful cultural servitude and plies them into the faulty notion that all users of Arabic are Arabs.

Although seemingly jarring in these assertions—traditional Arabists might not take kindly to such devastating commentary—Turki might actually be *not* too far from the truth. The United Nation's 2002 *Arab*

Human Development Report made the claim that MSA is not a natively spoken language, that it is not a language of daily spontaneous human interaction, and that it is alien and incomprehensible to more than one-half of the 300 million presumptive members of the "Arab nation" and the "Arab world."[18] Yet, Arab nationalists and their sympathizers see nothing remiss in this unhealthy sociocultural and linguistic situation. Indeed, this same MSA is still canonically approved to be the sole tool of thoughtful and candid public, cultural, and political intercourse in the Arab world, and is still expected to be the prism through which to view and understand the whole of the richly textured, multicultural, polyglot Middle East. In this sense, one might very well argue along Turki's lines of reasoning, that MSA[19] is only a tool of obfuscation, cultural suppression, coercion, and forced national homogenization.

It bears repeating that in the view of Arab intellectuals and (former) Arab nationalists like Fawaz Turki—but also, as we shall see, according to more mainstream thinkers like Nizar Qabbani, Taha Husayn, Adonis, and others—Arabic is a prohibitive straitjacket that institutionalizes orthodoxy and normalizes fear of authority, fear of innovation, fear of diversity, political and social decay, cultural and sexual inhibitions, voluntary servitude, and a resignation to a false sense of (Arab) national homogeneity.[20] Turki claimed that Arabs and Middle Easterners in general remain voluntarily tethered in hallowed submission to the inertia and cruelty of the Arabic language, creating in the process strictures and constraints regimenting their personal and cultural behaviors, and normalizing their oppression, their acquiescence in tyranny, obscurantism, and misogyny, their cultural and intellectual bondage, and their curious collective negation of their own region's hybridity and variety.[21] Turki maintained that the Arabs are not a zestful, dynamic, intellectually daring and tolerant lot simply because their revered language does not promote or encourage such instincts. There are rules of utterance and perception of the "self" and the "other" that are essential to the Arabic language itself, Turki wrote, a linguistic yoke as it were, which nourishes the Arab's negative tradition of stupor and decay, and his rejection of the Middle East's diversity and multiplicity of cultures.[22]

On the other hand, Turki held that the "dialectal" speech forms in the Middle East are zestful, dynamic, audacious, spontaneous, intellectually daring, and tolerant of diversity, precisely because they have long since broken from the strictures of MSA and can no longer be viewed as forms or variants of the Arabic language.[23] We saw earlier that even our times' most eloquent defender of Arabism, Arab causes, and the Arabist canon of Middle East Studies, admitted to the nebulous nature of the Arabic language—and might even have alluded in the process, albeit inadvertently,

to the murkiness of MSA's and Arab nationalism's claims to Middle Eastern uniformity.[24]

Language Memory and Identity in the Middle East will demonstrate that this ostensible "deadness" of the Arabic language, and modern Western scholarship's condescending neglect of this pungent linguistic reality—that is, its neglect of the fact that when one speaks of an "Arabic language" or an "Arab world," one is hardly referring to a single speech form or a uniform cultural mass—have contributed to the faulty interpretations and inverted realities that we often bring to bear when contemplating the Middle East. Indeed, the West's flawed and often problematic relationship with the Middle East is bound up in reductive interpretations of the region that are too often beholden to the biases and orthodoxies of Arabism and Arab nationalism; themselves a symbiotic bedmate and lovechild of MSA, and impulses that refuse to recognize the wide linguistic, social, and intellectual chasm that exists between MSA and the multitude of spoken "dialects."

This dogmatism and linguistic rigidity have, of course, not always been the case. The great Middle East scholars of the past—among them Edward Said's much maligned Orientalists—understood and incorporated the diverse and complex linguistic and philological aspects of Arabic and other Near Eastern languages into their own interpretations of Middle Eastern memories and identities. They have, alas, been blasted out of favor by modern Middle East scholars with little appreciation or little understanding of the "Arabic language factor." Even leading native Middle Eastern intellectuals, themselves avid practitioners of MSA and lifelong users of the Arabic language—like the Syrian poets Adonis and Nizar Qabbani, and the doyen of modern Arabic literature Taha Husayn—have consistently discussed in their works the centrality of the language issue and the role that the Arabic language has played in exacerbating the predicament of the Arabs and the latter's negation of the specificity of non-Arab Middle Easterners. According to Adonis, both Arabism and Islam, both products of a symbiotic relationship, were born out of a conception of "the self" that aims to negate and annihilate "the other," be that an internal "other" opposed to Arabist and Islamist orthodoxy, or an external "other" altogether alien to Arab society.[25] The reason for that, claimed Adonis, is that the Arabic language is not a natural medium for spontaneous human intercourse, but rather a fixed, well ordered, divinely inspired complex of immutable cultural patterns, legal conventions, and behavioral norms.[26] In that sense, the Arabic language (whether in its divine Koranic form or its MSA incarnation) counters and abrogates all that is defined by human free will, and demands undivided submission to its divine autarchy.[27] Additionally, Adonis maintained the physiognomy of Arab culture and Arab politics to be a physiognomy of servitude and

submissiveness, not one of free will and freedom;[28] a servitude that was in his view the result of cultural traditions and frames of reference that are corollaries of an absolutism intimately bound up in a religion that is itself foisted and sacralized by way of a rigidly structured and highly stylized Arabic language—both as an emblem and a tool of despotism and cultural suppression.[29] Ay, like Said's accursed Orientalists, Adonis and his cohorts are also dismissed as hysterical Cassandras and, worse still, as Arab "Uncle Toms," their works of criticism and calls for linguistic and social reform often overlooked, snubbed, and ridiculed.

This work will argue that the Arabic language, in both its MSA and Classical incarnations, lacks the directness, spontaneity, and intensity of feeling that characterizes spoken languages, and consequently occults Middle Eastern cultural diversity and consigns Middle Easterners to a homogenized, single, unitary "Arab" identity. Indeed, that is what Edward Said appeared to have been alluding to in the passage quoted earlier—even if that were not what he had explicitly stated. MSA blunts and stultifies the spirit; "it communicates but creates no communion" as Fawaz Turki put it. It is a lingo, not a language, for a language is a "living thing" that emanates from living minds by way of a lively dynamic garrulous mouth, not out of arcane books as noted by Edward Said's perspicacious children—who referred to the acquaintance of their father's who went out of his way to use MSA as a speech form, as to "the man who [spoke] like a book."[30] In this sense, Arabic can be said to, indeed, be a jargon (not a language per se) that both dictates and reflects the deadness of the spirits and the inertia of the cultures making use of it: "it possesses formality but no form, rhetoric but no style, dissimulation but no grace"; in short, it is an idiom that standardizes mediocrity, conformity, repressed energies and desires, and suppresses its users' adversarial, critical, creative, and innovative instincts.[31] As noted by Fawaz Turki, but also as we shall see with the illustrious Syrian—and former Arab nationalist—poets Adonis and Nizar Qabbani, the Arabic language is a language that demeans ideas and cheapens the value of human existence. It is a prohibitive iron collar that chokes and stunts the voices of its users, institutionalizes fear of Allah, and normalizes fear of diversity and innovation.[32]

Below is a powerful sampling of what, according to Fawaz Turki, the Arabic language does to its users. I reproduce this fragment of *Exile's Return* in its entirety because it eloquently illustrates one of my work's basic arguments; that language—especially as it pertains to the so-called standard imperious MSA—can be a more merciless (and, therefore, more effective) tool of tyranny and subjugation than actual physical brutality. In the passage below, Turki tells the story of his rebellious sixteen-year-old sister, Jasmine. A child of the catacombs, having grown in the anonymity and indigence of Beirut's Palestinian refugee camps, Jasmine, we are told,

has now taken a part-time job as a waitress at the Saint-Georges' Hotel; a symbol as it were of Lebanon's mid-1960s cosmopolitanism, glamour, and glitz. Long repressed and muzzled in the squalor and hardships of Palestinian refugee camps, the young Jasmine had now begun finding her voice, diving headfirst into the liberty and libertine ways of, then, the Middle East's "sin-city," Beirut. But, cautioned Turki,

> our culture was not ready for that kind of independence. [. . .] You challenge tradition, you pay with your life. One day Jasmine kissed a boy. [. . .] When Jasmine got home, [my elder brother] Moussa pointed at [her] and howled like an animal: "she soiled our honor!" [. . . He] then proceeded to pummel Jasmine until she was semiconscious. [. . .] Such is the power of tradition, [. . .] that no one in the house, including my ten-year-old brother, Samir, who was terrified, moved a finger to help her, [. . .] but then she had it coming, didn't she? [. . .] *What had to be done was done. Nothing unusual here! Then we sat down to have dinner*. [. . .] After the plates were cleared, we listened to the radio for an hour and drank tea in small glasses. [. . . and by] 11:00 p.m., we all went to sleep. Things were expected to return to normal [. . . and] they did, but not for Jasmine, [. . .] for she now sought an instrument with which [. . .] to express her refusal to accept her world's traditions. So, one day, less than three months after her beating, she went to bed with a boy. [. . .] When Moussa found out, we all knew what drastic fate awaited her. Her punishment was going to be a terrible one. [. . .] Moussa chose poison. [. . . Jasmine] drank the contents [. . .] and fell dead on the floor. [. . . Then] Moussa went out on the balcony, took out a gun that he had acquired for the occasion, and began to shoot rounds in the air. Now the whole neighborhood knows that we have redeemed our honor, just as tradition dictated. [. . .] I curse God, His world. I want to set fire to His universe. It is only my word, not His, that can feed life into a stone.[33]

In the Middle East, this is the terrible fate awaiting those who dare break with orthodoxy, those who dare flaunt their difference, those who dare demand cultural and linguistic humanism—or humanism and humanity *tout court*—and celebrate their personal, cultural, ethnic, and linguistic specificity and independence. Turki's is certainly a searing indictment of patriarchy and misogyny in the Middle East. But, clearly, his underlying message is that patriarchy and misogyny are symptoms of more deeply rooted pathologies ensconced in the brutality and imperiousness of a language (that no one *can* or *dare* speak). It is the Arabic language and linguistic authoritarianism, argues Turki, which create the repressive conditions through which Middle Easterners are forced into self-imposed mutism and are "devoured" by a tradition that demands undivided allegiance to a single culture.[34] Even those opposed to these conditions, that is, Turki's Samir and the other battered quiet majorities in the Middle East, are acquiescent and resigned to their own bondage. Thus, all of the

users of the Arabic language, especially those advocating on its behalf, reluctant advocates as they might be, are complicit in the crimes committed in the name and for the sake of MSA and the unity and conformity that it mandates. Yet Turki dares scream a muffled rebellion against this language in the final sentence describing his sister's ordeal; "I want to set fire to [God's] universe," he said, "it is only my word [my language], not His, that can feed life into a stone."[35]

It is true that cultures mold and nourish the languages of their practitioners and adherents. But that is not necessarily the case with MSA. MSA is not merely the language of Qoran and the liturgy of over a billion Muslims. Arabic is God and Tradition incarnate. Hundreds of millions of Arabs and Muslims, even those with inadequate knowledge and understanding of MSA, believe Arabic to be the hallowed language of God, and therefore a pristine primordial idiom that must not be sullied with the trivialities of languages, dialects, and narratives that dwell outside its well-ordered universe.[36] The Arabic language according to Adonis is not a "natural" medium for spontaneous human intercourse; it is rather a fixed, well ordered, divinely inspired complex of immutable cultural patterns, legal conventions, and behavioral norms; in that sense, the Arabic language (whether in its divine Qoranic form or its Modern Standard incarnation) counters and abrogates all that is defined by human free will, and demands undivided submission to its divine autarchy.[37]

If we can read Turki's Jasmine as metaphor, then she must surely stand as a symbol for those silent Middle Easterners, minority peoples upholding narratives and cultural references that ostensibly betray the unitary orthodoxies of the Arabic language and its keepers. The emotional beating of Jasmine and the savage physical punishment meted out against her were "nothing unusual" as noted by Turki. Her fate was that of those who dare raise so much as a whimper in the face of orthodoxy. Turki's poignant "and then we sat down to have dinner" after his sister's vicious clobbering, is a pungent statement on the brutality of tradition—embodied in language—and the resigned quietude of those subjected to it. "What had to be done was done," and no one dared object, conceded Turki. Indeed, the minutiae of his subsequent descriptive—"we listened to the radio for an hour and drank tea in small glasses . . . ," etc.—with its exquisite Proustian attention to detail, perhaps trivial detail, is a chilling reminder of the banality of cruelty and the perfunctory manners with which those who deviate from the Arabist praxis can be marginalized, or worse, disposed of. We shall see later in this work how Arab nationalist ideologues like Sati' al-Husri and Michel Aflaq would elevate this form of cruelty—against those rejecting Arabism—to the level of a national ethos, indeed a national duty and a limitless source of national pride and joy, even approaching carnal-sexual reward. Being merciless and brutal

to the point of physically and metaphorically annihilating those Middle Easterners advocating non-Arab narratives became one of the creeds of Michel Aflaq's Baath (*Anglice* Resurrection) Party.[38]

Language Memory and Identity in the Middle East is an attempt to rehabilitate modern Middle Eastern cultural and linguistic reformers who provided alternatives to reductive Arab nationalism and Islamist orthodoxy. It is an attempt to recover and restitute some of those reformers' contributions to the region's intellectual history, and bring back to the fore the issue of language as a key factor in shaping—and misshaping—the Middle East, its dissonances, and our conceptions—and misconceptions—of it. Our times' prevalent paradigm of a monolithic, homogenous, Arab Middle East, rests on a false and unjustified assumption. It posits, based on patently European premises, that race, nationality, language, culture, and territory run parallel in the Middle East, and it is grounded in the favored textbook French model of Frenchmen inhabiting a territory known as France and speaking a language called French. Alas, the Middle East is shaped by traditions and informed by histories quite different from those of Europe; ones that seldom justify such conflations of language, territory, and nationality into single reductive cognomens. Aramaic, one of the languages that preceded Arabic as the Middle East's modern lingua franca, was until the seventh century spoken by Aramaeans and non-Aramaeans alike; namely by Nabataeans—presumably Levantine "proto-Arabs"—and by Jews among others. Similarly, during the early centuries of the Islamic "Golden Age," peoples from Iran to the Levant, and from Africa to Europe, used Arabic natively, yet exhibited no sense of a single common Arab identity. *Language Memory and Identity in the Middle East* seeks to bring this corrective back to our modern readings of the region. It will have a special focus on Lebanon given that Lebanon has traditionally been a battlefield where a slew of Middle Eastern scores were settled and where swarms of new ideas were tested. So has Lebanon traditionally acted as the region's template for change, and a barometer gauging its problems and charting its progress. One observer claimed that Lebanon has "always been at its heart a Christian homeland" where heterodox ideas, libertine mentalities, and varied cultures have traditionally collided, cavorted, fused, and bloomed.[39] In that sense, Lebanon has often acted as a Middle Eastern cultural and intellectual entrepôt, a freedom harbor and a cross-current as it were, where tendencies and notions that are curbed elsewhere in the Middle East could always flourish and expand—and perhaps even, given time, infect the neighborhood's conservative Arabs and effect positive change.[40]

Lebanon's openness and humanistic adaptability, according to Fouad Ajami, were a function of the country's favorable climate, topology, and diverse cultural and human composition.[41] A small mountainous nation

like Lebanon, straddling Mediterranean Europe and the Syrian Desert, deeply influenced by French culture and language, synthesizing centuries of intellectual, commercial, and linguistic traffic between East and West, could easily pilfer the Mediterranean Sea's hybridity and rhythms and adapt them to the Middle East's atavisms. That is why the linguistic humanism that—as this work will show—was launched from Lebanon of the early twentieth century, could signal the beginning of the Middle East's transformation, and march toward a new kind of "reformation" in the twenty-first century. At the very least, a linguistic humanism as practiced in Lebanon, recognizing and celebrating that country's linguistic and cultural diversity, might pave the way to a rediscovery of a broader, more honest and syncretistic perspective on the Middle East as a whole, and a stronger testimony and validation of the region's inherent, millenarian, cultural, and ethnic diversity. What's more, Lebanon is the main Levantine (and Middle Eastern) country to witness, since its inception, a systematized blossoming of its local dialect as a distinct "language," thus adding further validity to its claimed national specificity, and shoring up that claim. This Lebanese experiment, it is hoped, will serve as a template to the rest of the Middle East, and will contribute to a more inclusive, more accurate, and broader—ideologically untainted—conversation on the region, and ultimately an acceptance of the reality and legitimacy—and why not, the finality—of the current Middle East state-system and state-nationalisms.

NOTES

1. Bernard Lewis, *The Middle East: A Brief History of the Last 2,000 Years* (New York: Scribner, 1995), 244.
2. *Encyclopedia of Arabic Language and Linguistics.* General Editor Kees Versteegh. Brill, 2009. Brill Online. Boston College. 21 October 2009. www.brillonline.nl.proxy.bc.edu/subscriber/uid=1492/entry?entry=eall_SIM-vol2-0005 (emphasis added).
3. Versteegh, *Encyclopedia of Arabic Language and Linguistics* (emphasis added).
4. Efraim Karsh, *Islamic Imperialism: A History* (New Haven, Conn. and London: Yale University Press, 2006), 28–29.
5. T. E. Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* (New York and London: Anchor Books, Doubleday, 1991), 33.
6. Karsh, *Imperialism*, 7.
7. Karsh, *Imperialism*, 128. See also Efraim and Inari Karsh's *Empires of the Sand: The Struggle for the Mastery of the Middle East, 1789–1923* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1999), 173.
8. Elie Kedourie, "Not So Grand Illusions," in *New York Review of Books*, vol. 9, no. 9 (Nov. 23, 1967). No page number.

9. Joel Carmichael, *The Shaping of the Arabs: A Study in Ethnic Identity* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1967), 309.
10. Karsh, *Empires of the Sand*, 2–3.
11. Fouad Ajami, *The Arab Predicament: Arab Political Thought and Practice since 1967* (Cambridge, Mass. and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 3.
12. Edward Said, "Israel-Palestine: A Third Way," *Le Monde Diplomatique* (Paris), August–September 1998.
13. Robert Irwin, *Dangerous Knowledge: Orientalism and Its Discontents* (New York: Overlook Press, 2006), 3–4.
14. Irwin, *Dangerous Knowledge*, 285–86.
15. Ajami, *Arab Predicament*, 34–35.
16. Ajami, *Arab Predicament*, 34.
17. Edward Said, "Living in Arabic," *Al-Ahram Weekly* (Cairo), February 2004 (emphasis added).
18. See the United Nations Development Programme's *Arab Human Development Report 2002* (New York: United Nations Publications, 2002), 51. See also "How the Arabs Compare: Arab Human Development Report," *Middle East Quarterly*, vol. IX, no. 1 (Fall 2002): 59–67.
19. Modern Standard Arabic is simply a modernized form of Classical or Koranic Arabic. It is sometimes referred to as "literary Arabic."
20. Fawaz Turki, *Exile's Return: The Making of a Palestinian-American* (New York: Free Press, 1994), 120–26.
21. Turki, *Exile's Return*, 120–26.
22. Turki, *Exile's Return*, 120–26.
23. Turki, *Exile's Return*, 124.
24. Said, "Living in Arabic."
25. Adonis, *Al-Thabit wa al-Mutahawwil* [The Static and the Changing], vol. I (Beirut, Lebanon: Dar al-Awda, Fourth Edition, 1983), 1.
26. Adonis, *The Static and the Changing*, 107.
27. Adonis, *The Static and the Changing*, 107–8.
28. Adonis, *Identité inachevée* (Paris: Editions du Rocher, 2004), 15–23.
29. Adonis, *Identité inachevée*, 23. See also Moustapha Safouan's *Why Are the Arabs Not Free? The Politics of Writing* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 48–49.
30. Said, "Living in Arabic."
31. Turki, *Exile's Return*, 121–22.
32. Turki, *Exile's Return*, 124–25.
33. Turki, *Exile's Return*, 58–61 (emphasis added).
34. Turki, *Exile's Return*, 58–61.
35. Turki, *Exile's Return*, 58–61.
36. Safouan, *Why Are the Arabs Not Free?*, 54.
37. Adonis, *The Static and the Changing*, 107–8.
38. Michel Aflaq, *Fii Sabiil al-Baath* (Beirut, Lebanon: Dar at-Tali'a, 1963), 40–41.
39. Fouad Ajami, "The Autumn of the Autocrats," *Foreign Affairs*, May–June, 2005.
40. Ajami, *Autumn of the Autocrats.*
41. Ajami, *Autumn of the Autocrats.*

1



Arabism and Its Rivals

If I choose to write in French, which is the language of my country, rather than in Latin, which is the language of my teachers, it is because I hope that those who rely purely on their natural and sheer sense of reason will be the better judges of my opinions than those who still swear by ancient books. And those who meld reason with learning, the only ones I incline to have as judges of my own work, will not, I should hope, be partial to Latin to the point of refusing to hear me out simply because I happen to express my opinions in the vulgar [French] language.[1]

René Descartes

Like Descartes's seventeenth-century Latin, today's Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) is the imperial tool of a partisan political enterprise, not an instrument of a spoken everyday language possessing vitality and malleability, let alone functional and authentic "national" purpose. Arabs do not use MSA as their natural, native, spoken vernacular. Indeed, one could argue that MSA is the vector of an elitist view of language, memory, and identity in the Middle East—more specifically an Arab nationalist and Muslim traditionalist view—and one not reflecting the Middle East's inherent cultural and ethnic diversity. Few educated Arabs today can claim to have functional, spontaneous fluency in MSA. And if one accounts for the 50 percent illiteracy[2] in the Arab Middle East—that is 50 percent of presumptive Arabs who have no formal schooling in, and consequently no understanding of what is often touted as their national language—one can easily discern the frailty of the Arab nationalist allegations about a cohesive, uniform, homogenous "Arab world." Yet it is

precisely this faulty Arab nationalist paradigm that dominates Western scholarship and Western interpretations of the Middle East.

Indeed, for nearly a century of Western academic interest in the modern Middle East, the region has been viewed and dealt with almost exclusively through political and geographic semantics and by way of mental clichés beholden to the biases of Arabs, Arab nationalists, Muslims, and the Arab-Israeli conflict. A leading Middle East scholar once marveled at how scholarship in his field, that is, Middle East Studies as a Western academic endeavor, had in the last one hundred years become a tedious and soporific preoccupation besotted by Arab disaffections, Arab fears, Arab hopes, and Arab concerns, to the neglect of other renditions and interpretations of the Middle East.[3] One could even argue that there exists a strong "antiminority" thrust in Middle Eastern studies today; a tendency that ignores a very important dimension in the politics of the region's history, memory, and identity. In fact, a Middle East history believed to challenge the assumed paramountcy of the prevalent Arab-Muslim narrative is a scholarly pursuit that is not academically fashionable; its study generally perceived to be anti-Arab and anti-Muslim. Yet Middle Eastern minorities, peoples and cultures that come in shades other than the dominant Arab and Muslim ones, are a glaring reality—although not necessarily a politically "relevant" or "desirable" one—and can often boast narratives and histories predating the emergence of Arabs and Muslims from the seventh-century Arabian Peninsula.

Neat and comforting as it might seem to exponents of Arabism, this restricted vision that presumes the Middle East to be a one-dimensional monolithic Arab-Muslim cultural universe, offers only a partial—and ultimately false—reading of a region perhaps as intensely complex and diverse as it might seem exclusively Arab or Muslim. But this tendency is of course not without historical merit and practical value. The Middle East is indeed home to Arabs and Muslims, and the summary label "Arab" in reference to this richly textured composite of peoples and histories offers an anodyne patina of harmony and coherence to what would otherwise be a confusing Babel of identities. But at the same time, this bad habit of slotting inherently diverse peoples in overarching monistic labels reflects a lack of imagination and intellectual laziness that often mislead rather than enlighten.

Pluralism and multiplicity of identities have been hallmarks of Middle Eastern history for millennia, even as this diversity—always falling outside the purview of prevalent modern Arabist paradigms—continues to be bereft of adequate scholarly consideration commensurate with its importance to a just and objective understanding of the region.[4] It bears repeating that the Middle East is far too complex, far too nuanced, and far too culturally variegated to be reduced to politically soothing monochro-

matic categories or a single collective identity. To say that the Middle East is coterminous with the "Arab World" would be tantamount to saying that Europe and its peoples—or Africa and its peoples for that matter—are homogeneous entities, the result of the same historical circumstances, the outcome of the same cultural experience, and the consequence of the same standard language and the same ethnic core. Yet, such is the power of arbitrary Arab nationalist orthodoxy, tying its unitary impulses to its anticolonialist and anti-imperialist liberation beginnings, bolstering its claims by way of the Western left's patronizing refusal to validate any Middle Eastern narratives unaffiliated with Arabism and Islam.

The Ancient Greek convention assuming a speaker of a given language to be a member of a specific ethnos doesn't quite apply to the composite polyglot nature of Middle Eastern identities. Languages in the Middle East are not—and never were—markers of ethnic membership or symbols of a single cultural identity. In both the ancient and modern Middle East, assortments of cultural and ethnic groups have always wielded the languages of their times' dominant civilizations, without necessarily merging into those civilizations and integrating the latter's ethnic and cultural parameters. Six millennia ago, Sumerian was one such dominant culture foisting its own speech-form as the Middle East's standard lingua franca. Hence, not unlike the MSA of today, Sumerian was used by Middle Easterners who were bona fide Sumerians and non-Sumerians alike. After a long run, Sumerian itself was eclipsed, and yielded to prolonged historical phases where, in turn, Akkadian, Aramaic, Greek, Latin, Turkish—and a number of other speech-forms—became the dominant administrative languages of the Middle East, again, without necessarily diluting the entire region into some uniform, exclusively Akkadian, Aramaean, Hellenistic, Roman, or Turkish culture. And even as Arabic was gradually adopted as the language of government in the seventh and eighth centuries of the current era, on the heels of the Arabs' conquest of the region, lexical and scriptal elements of the Middle East's earlier Canaanite, Aramaic, Latin, and Greek vernaculars impregnated Arabic even as they were eventually replaced by it.[5]

A lingua franca, or a dominant administrative language, does not necessarily entail monolingualism, cultural uniformity, or national cohesion. Even in the West where ethnicity is often defined by language, many exceptions remain and validate the time-honored Middle Eastern model. In the Anglophone world, Americans, Irishmen, Scotsmen, and Nigerians are all native English speakers, but not Englishmen.[6] Likewise, Belgians, Quebeckers, and Swiss can be native francophones without necessarily being considered Frenchmen. In the modern Middle East, a form of Arabic happens to have gradually grown into the region's dominant language. But like Sumerian, Aramaic, and Greek before it, this Arabic

dominance—akin to that of English, French and Spanish—was more the by-product of conquest and colonization than it was a sign of some sui generis endogenous cultural uniformity. Yet the Arabic language remains the overarching benchmark of identity in the Middle East and the assumed cement and nimbus of Arabism and Arab nationalism.

It would not be unfair to point out that the seventh-century Arab conquest of the Middle East was as banal and stereotypical as any other military imperial enterprise in the history of mankind. The Arab conquest did not take place in a cultural and ethnic vacuum, and its cultural and linguistic encroachments on its colonial chattel were no different from those of any other, earlier or later, colonial intrusion. The bulk of the peoples and cultures that the seventh-century Arab imperial enterprise brought under its sway were certainly not Arabs and not speakers of Arabic. But over time those conquered Middle Easterners—Persians, Aramaeans, Syrians, Byzantines, Jews, and others—were in turn, both coerced and seduced into adopting the Arabic language and its rituals, integrating them into their daily lives. It is true that literary brilliance, intellectual effervescence, and scientific advancements have all taken place in Arabic, and that "Arabized" Persians and Byzantines and Spaniards and Syrians had all taken part in the dynamic intellectual crucible that became the Arabic language between the eighth and thirteenth centuries. But it is equally true that cultural orthodoxy and linguistic imperialism have also had their high mark in, and by way of the Arabic language. Not unlike the way in which the European conquest of the Americas, the African slave trade, and the massacres of the Aborigines played a role in making English, Spanish, Portuguese, and French into "world languages," so did the Arab-Muslim conquests of the seventh century make Arabic into a "world language"; a vector of intellectual grandeur to be sure, but an instrument of cultural domination nonetheless, and a tool through which indigenous non-Arab populations were willy-nilly incorporated into a new Arab order and a new "Arab world."

As mentioned earlier, Arabic is a dead language.[7] Yet the Arabic-language-based criterion of identity continues to inform the prevalent perceptions and depictions of the Middle East, even as it continues to inaccurately conflate language—and a dead language no less—with ethnos, nationality, and geography. Besides being an Ancient Greek legacy, this parameter of identity predominates the common portrayals of the Middle East because it reflects an ostensibly successful and familiar European model. Indeed, the political map of modern Europe, with very few exceptions, points to countries bearing cognate names that apply to territories, nationalities, ethnicities, and languages all at once.[8] Accordingly, the French Republic would be inhabited by Frenchmen who spoke French, Italy would be home to Italian-speaking Italians, and

Sweden would be the homeland of the Swedes whose national language was Swedish. With the rise of modern nationalism and its introduction into the Middle East during the early part of the twentieth century, these quintessentially European patterns of identity became the norm championed by Arab nationalists—and their foreign friends—suppressing in the process millenarian peoples and narratives that, up until then, were never defined in linguistic terms, let alone by way of a single language and in terms suggesting a uniform Arab ethnic, linguistic, and cultural identity.

In the Middle East, there are no historical or conceptual equivalents to the European trinity of land-ethnicity-and-language as defined by the same set of cognate appellations. That is, being French, living in a territorial-state named France, and speaking the French language are European concepts par excellence reflecting European circumstances with no antecedent historical analogues in the Near East. The idea that there exists a well-delineated geographic area called "Arabia," inhabited by "Arabs" who spoke "Arabic," is a fairly recent notion for the Middle East, one that has its intellectual roots in Europe, not Arabia, and one, at best, referring to a vague geographic notion identified by the Arabs *themselves* as "the Peninsula of the Arabs" (*Jazeerat al-'Arab*), not "Arabia" per se.[9] Add to that the fact that the language touted as vehicle and cement of that Arab nation is as useful a medium of verbal communication to members of that nation as Dante's Latin would have been useful to today's Italians or Frenchmen, and the plot thickens.[10]

CONFLATING LANGUAGE AND IDENTITY

History, memory, and identity are not the function of language in the Middle East, and defining a user of the Arabic language as an Arab—although a distinguishing motif of Arab nationalism—is a criterion that, until the early twentieth century, remained incomprehensible to most Middle Easterners. We saw earlier that the nationalist doctrine—Arab or otherwise—which argues that speakers of the same language somehow constitute, or must constitute, a single nation is patently defective. There is also something blatantly false in the claim that the Arabic language itself is a cohesive, coherent, unitary language. MSA is a literary, highly regulated language that is acquired *only* through formal education. It is never spoken natively, and if indeed spoken—or rather "vocalized"—then only in constructed situations, out of prepared texts, and then *only* by a rare select few educated Arabs. Raymond Gordon's *Ethnologue* defined MSA as the second language of 246,000,000 nonnative speakers, and as a competency that is:

> not a first language. Used for education, official purposes, written materials, and formal speeches. Classical Arabic is used for religion and ceremonial purposes, having archaic vocabulary. MSA is a modernized variety of Classical Arabic. In most Arab countries only the well educated have adequate proficiency in Standard Arabic, while over 100,500,000 do not.[11]

Versions of this definition of the Arabic language will be revisited repeatedly throughout this work, not so much in an attempt to discredit Arabic, nor to add to its mystique and bear out the rigors often associated with learning it, but merely to stress the fact that there *are* indigenous Middle Eastern identity parameters and legitimate Middle Eastern national claims that lie outside the confines of the traditional paradigms associated with the Arabic language and Arab nationalism. Harvard linguist Wheeler Thackston, for instance, told a Christian Science Monitor reporter in 2002 that many teachers of Arabic in the West purposely obfuscate "the vast difference [that exists] between the written standard [Arabic that they teach] and the spoken dialects."[12] This is perhaps understandable in view of the scholarly contempt with which Arabists—both Westerners and Middle Easterners alike—usually treat dialects.[13] Attention to colloquial languages is viewed by many language purists and Arab nationalists as an imperialist scheme to splinter the Arab world and undermine its unity, for only MSA deserves, according to that view, the dignity of being called a language, and "dialects" are nothing more than defective lower speech-forms. Of course, this ignores the fact that, not only are those very (lowly, defective) dialects a glaring reality of life—and certainly *not* an "imperialist" fabrication—but they are also the region's only *spoken* speech-forms that are natural spontaneous endogenous Middle Eastern emanations. Indeed, as noted by Gordon, MSA *is* the artificial language form in the Middle East, limited to academic, religious, and formal institutional frameworks, and certainly qualifying as a "scheme"—this time pilfered, not by Westerners, but by Arabists intent on duping varied and diverse Middle Eastern cultures into a uniform Arab identity. In fact, Kees Versteegh, a leading Arabic language historian, noted that until the seventeenth century, most Western Arabists "did not even know about the existence of [. . .] colloquial language[s],"[14] let alone did they express interest in learning them, teaching them, or using them to splinter an Arab nation—which, in any case, was never in history a coherent unified political or geographical reality warranting this alleged insidious splintering.[15]

Among the Arabs, Arab nationalists, and their sympathizers, colloquial languages are dismissed as lowly, deformed speech patterns unworthy of being spoken, let alone recognized, studied, codified, and taught. Even those untrained in the rigors of MSA are emotionally and ideologically

conditioned to malign their own native speech forms and to revere MSA as the hallowed and definitive vector of Arabness and Islam. The sobering truth, however, is not only that there is *not* a cohesive, coherent geographic entity corresponding grosso modo to the "Arab World" meriting the designation "Arabia." Even a unified Standard Arabic language that is assumed to be a first-mother-language, acquired natively, touted as a national language, and ostensibly spoken by the totality of the proposed members of "Arabia," the "Arab world," or the Arab nation, this *also* is more hyperbole than it is fact. Indeed, the speech forms traditionally referred to as Arabic, account for over thirty language varieties, are spoken in more than a dozen Middle Eastern countries, and are often mutually incomprehensible to the point of constituting bona fide languages in their own right.[16] Yet accuracy is sacrificed for the sake of simplicity—if not ideological bias—and these multiple languages are willy-nilly labeled as one Arabic language, and their users summarily anointed Arabs.[17] Of course, there had been Middle Easterners, throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—perhaps even earlier—who did view components of their identities in linguistic terms, a fact that might give merit and historical depth to language-based Arabism. There were those who maintained they were speakers of, say, Armenian, Turkish, French, Syriac, and perhaps even Arabic—to name but a few—but these references to language were more often than not expressions of "social snobbery" than they were relevant and valid parameters of coherent ethnic identities, exceptions rather than general rule.[18]

That is not to say that there were no Arabs and no Arab identity in the Middle East prior to the advent of twentieth-century nationalism. There were! However, Arab nationalism and the idea that users of the Arabic language constituted a single unified, cohesive nation with a collective memory and a common national language, and that this Arabic nation deserved—and had the right—to fulfill its destiny with the establishment of a single Arab state; *that* idea itself was nonextant prior to the early decades of the twentieth century. Indeed, up until the advent of Arab nationalism, corporate identity, and self-perception in much of the Middle East were religiously—not linguistically—defined. Of course, people identified themselves—and were identified by others—by way of a slew of other criteria: familial, tribal, geographic, and others. But the only standard self-image that mattered, the one that trumped all others, was religious. And although it made sense at certain levels of group affiliation to use local, geographic attributes—for example, Beiruti, Cairene, Jerusalemite, Baghdadi, and other geographic eponyms, some of which have survived into the modern era in the form of family names—in practice it made more sense for Middle Easterners to use ethnoreligious identifiers—for example, Druze, Alawite, Copt, Assyrian, Sunni, and so on.

Still, there were Arabs, and, historically, defining who was an Arab was rather simple. Up until the early twentieth century, scholars from both the Middle East and the West considered an Arab to be a person whose ancestry was in the Arabian Peninsula and parts of the Fertile Crescent. Someone from Jeddah was an Arab, a Cairene was not. Indeed, historian Bernard Lewis has shown that the Middle East was a mix of cultures, particularisms, nationalities, and self-perceptions that never enjoyed a single uniform collective identity, let alone an exclusively Arab one.[19] This began to change in the early twentieth century when Arab nationalist elites imbued in national creeds pilfered from the West, began superimposing a new overarching national identity on preexisting group affiliations. In the 1930s, the idea that one is an Arab if one spoke Arabic came into vogue.[20] This new linguistic pattern of identity—again, initially a European concept reflecting specifically European circumstances—came on the heels of World War I, the result of the postwar concept of "self-determination" of European communities which already *had* languages with long literary traditions, which could be billed as emblems of specific national identities.[21]

The Middle East had no such "tribal" languages possessing the requisite literary and cultural tradition upon which to base a specific identity. Rather, the Middle East was, and remains to this day, a paradox of multiple identities based on religion, sect, town, village, family, and other group associations and interests, the majority of which, until the emergence of Arab nationalism, did not involve the Arabic language. Indeed, when the modern Egyptian poet Lewis 'Awad wrote about his homeland, he did so in colloquial Egyptian, not MSA. When the Lebanese-American thinker Gibran Khalil Gibran yearned for his native Mount Lebanon, he did so more comfortably in English than in the nascent, stilted MSA of his times.[22] When the fifteenth-century Maronite bishop of Cyprus, Gabriel Alkalai, wrote his history of Lebanon, he did so in *Karshuni*, his local Lebanese speech-form written in Syriac characters.[23] Even the modern Arabic works of illustrious Egyptian novelist, Nagib Mahfouz, feature internal monologues in Egyptian vernacular, not the traditional MSA for which he was famous.[24] Some Bedouin poetry is, likewise, recited in a number of colloquial variants.[25]

Nevertheless, the twentieth-century European-inspired Arab nationalism attempted to assign an Arab ethnic identity to an arbitrary language, MSA. It bears repeating that like Medieval Latin and Latin's equivalents in the ancient Middle East—from Sumerian to Akkadian, Aramaic, Greek, Turkish, and Latin itself—MSA might have been the ceremonial and official language of government and religion, but was never used colloquially; it was the language of literature not "the language of life."[26] Even today, as an archaic artificial language, MSA remains the domain of newspapers, not

conversations. Arabs themselves speak a multiplicity of languages "which are downgraded to dialects" but which, in the words of Wheeler Thackston, "resemble [Modern Standard] Arabic as much as Latin resembles English."[27] Yet the charade continues; all of those varied speech-forms continue to be lumped under one "Arabic" rubric; and all of their speakers—even with very low levels of mutual comprehensibility—continue to be referred to as "Arabs."

THE WARDENS OF ARAB NATIONALISM

Not unlike other absurd, totalitarian, racialist, linguistically based "pan-movements"—from pan-Germanism to pan-Slavism—Arab nationalism was essentially an "enlarged tribal consciousness" with an overbearing and coercive impulse aiming at forcibly uniting peoples of a presumably similar ethnic and linguistic origin, in total disregard of their independent histories, social experiences, and cultural accretions.[28] In this sense, Arabism and Arab nationalism held that anyone remotely connected to the Arabs, even if not born within the Arabs' "geographic realms" (i.e., the "Arab world"), and even if alien to the experiences, language, or cultural predilections of Arabs, those persons are perforce Arabs. Indeed, Arab nationalists used linguistic definitions of Arabism to deny the cultural claims of ethnic or sectarian minorities in the Middle East. Sati' al-Husri (1880–1967), a Syrian writer who played an important role in the crystallization of this sort of compulsory Arabness, maintained that:

> Every person who speaks Arabic is an Arab. Every individual associated with an Arabic-speaker or with an Arabic-speaking people is an Arab. If he does not recognize [his Arabness], and if he is not proud of his Arabness, then we must look for the reasons that have made him take this stand. It may be an expression of ignorance; in that case we must teach him the truth. It may emanate from an indifference of sorts, or a faulty consciousness; in that case we must enlighten him and lead him to his true self. It may be the result of extreme egoism; in that case we must limit his egoism. But under no circumstances should we say: "as long as he does not wish to be an Arab, and as long as he is disdainful of his Arabness, then he is not an Arab." He is an Arab regardless of his own wishes. Whether ignorant, indifferent, recalcitrant or disloyal, he is an Arab, but an Arab without consciousness or feelings, and perhaps even without conscience.[29]

Al-Husri's invitation—a disquieting, almost violent exhortation to embrace his domineering Arabness—is one based on a purported linguistic unity of the Arab peoples; a unity which a priori presumes the Arabic language itself to be a unified, coherent verbal medium, used by all members of

al-Husri's proposed nation. But the use of Arabic as a criterion for identity to the same extent that, say, French can be used as a criterion for national identity, is somewhat problematic. As mentioned earlier, Arabic is not a single, uniform, common language. Instead, it is on the one hand a codified written standard, a literary and administrative language that is never natively spoken by anyone—and accessible to only those members of the Arab nation who have had rigorous training in it. On the other hand, "Arabic" is also a multitude of speech forms, contemptuously referred to as "dialects," different from each other and from the standard language itself to the same extent as French is different from other Romance languages and from Latin. Yet, all of these languages—both the multiple spontaneous (natively spoken) vernaculars and the standard (never spoken) written form—are all referred to as "Arabic" by al-Husri and his Arab nationalist cohorts. This is analogous to using the same appellation "Latin" in reference to the language of ancient Rome, the language of the Medieval Catholic Church and the royal courts of Europe, the language of Renaissance humanists, and the modern languages of France, Spain, Italy, and Portugal;[30] shoddy, misleading, and risibly inaccurate taxonomy by any other standard, but, remarkably, totally acceptable in the Middle Eastern context.

Yet, this is the lapidary brevity and the chilling finality with which Sati' al-Husri and his cohorts foisted their blanket "Arab" label on the mosaic of peoples, ethnicities, and languages that is the Middle East. And this is the prevalent narrative of modern Middle East history that still informs most of our views and perceptions of the region. "If you're from the Middle East you're an Arab, and you're an Arab if I say so," Sati' al-Husri seemed to suggest. For unlike the intellectuals and peoples of Europe, from whom Arabists had borrowed their own national models, al-Husri and other Arab nationalists were still besotted by their "Latin"—their MSA—and still unwilling to allow the recognition and admission of their own native vernacular languages as bona fide languages in the manner of their European prototypes. This is so even as some Arab nationalist intellectuals, al-Husri chief among them, made less than adequate use of MSA, thus betraying their status as both outsiders and neophytes to their much vaunted MSA.

If al-Husri advocated a forced Arabness for anyone prattling an idiom resembling Arabic, Michel Aflaq, an apostle of his and cofounder of the Baath Party, promoted outright violence and cruelty against those users of the Arabic language who refused to conform to an overarching Arab identity as postulated by al-Husri. Arab nationalists, Aflaq preached, would be foolish to condone the national and cultural claims of others who renounce the Arabness offered to them. He was brutally honest in his justification of violence and physical punishment against those users of Arabic who rejected their imputed Arabness. Aflaq wrote that:

> It is both comical and shameful that Arabs should be thinking of humanism and of supporting those other nations [presumably users of Arabic who are not attracted by Arabism and claim a separate identity.] . . . When we [Arabs] are cruel to them, we know that our cruelty is in order to bring them back to [Arabness], to their true selves of which they are ignorant. Their potential will, which has not been clarified yet, is with us, even as their swords are drawn against us.[31]

In fact, the cruelty which Aflaq unabashedly called for, and the repression, and outright annihilation of the non-Arab "other," his cultural references and his national narratives—which were presumably detrimental to Arabism—would in time become some of the favored operational tenets of Baathism.[32] But with skillful seductive use of Arabic semantics, Aflaq transformed the crass language of violence and brutality inherent to his ideas, into a sublime gospel of love—self-love and love of the nation. Indeed, it is with Aflaq and with his preached brutality that the story of Fawaz Turki's Jasmine, recounted in the Introduction, is validated and normalized. Arab nationalists, Aflaq professed, must practice a form of "loving brutality" against those who go astray from the nation, because Arab nationalism is "before anything else, love," and as a popular Arabic adage goes—reminiscent of the English "tough love"—"he who smites you does so because he so loves you." Therefore, according to Aflaq, Arab nationalists must be pitiless and cruel because they love their disoriented and errant "Arab brothers." Arab nationalists must, therefore, be unforgiving with those members of their nation who have gone astray,

> [and] they must be merciless to themselves as well. [. . .] They must be imbued with a powerful hatred, a hatred unto death, towards any individuals who embody an idea contrary to the idea of Arab nationalism. [. . .] An idea that is opposed to ours does not emerge *ex nihilo*: it is the outcome of individuals who must themselves be annihilated, so that their very idea might in turn be also annihilated. The existence of an enemy of our idea vivifies it and sends the blood coursing in our veins. Any action that does not call forth in us living emotions and does not make us feel the spasms of love [. . .] that does not make our blood race in our veins and our pulse beat faster, is a sterile action.[33]

Aflaq's liberal use of vocabulary ordinarily associated with love—physical, sexual love—is neither gratuitous nor frivolous here. His are allusions to the base carnal gratification that cruelty and physical violence are believed to engender in sadistic psychopaths—only the psychopaths that Aflaq is egging on in this passage might have been the sexually repressed youth of his Arab nation; a youth whose inhibited sexuality is invited to find release in an orgy of violence against strayed Arabs. This is the same parochial despotic Arab nationalist of Fawaz Turki's brother

Moussa; a traditionalist, conservative bully who clobbered his own—sexually liberated—sister nearly to death, only to subsequently force her to drink a poison-chalice he had himself borne to her lips a few weeks later—her reward for having strayed from cultural exigencies and tradition. In the tradition of Aflaq, Moussa was a bully and a cold-blooded murderer who, as soon as he kills his own sister, proudly races to his balcony, brandishes a gun—a phallic symbol of his own repressed manhood—and spurts out staccato rounds of his *baroud d'honneur* in the air; a "gun-salute" as it were, broadcasting the death of an apostate and an errant family member, reclaiming his culture's—and his own—challenged virility. With Aflaq's prescription above, as with Moussa's deliberate and brutal reaction to his sister's straying from the herd, there certainly seems to be a state of ecstasy, clearly preceded by some sort of anticipatory arousal as a prelude to meting out beastly punishment on those rejecting Arabism. "Blood coursing in our veins," "pulse beating faster," and "spasms of love," are part of a phraseology that would clearly belong in the vocabulary of love were they not disturbing references to the "carnal rewards" of acts of brutality and physical annihilation rained on those who stand in the way of tradition and the nation.

ARABISM'S LEBANESE RIVALS

Yet other models of Middle Eastern identities exist. And as this work will attempt to demonstrate, a considerable number of twentieth-century activists and intellectuals opposed to Arab nationalism did make numerous attempts at escaping the bondage of MSA and the ideology spawned by it. They endeavored to elevate their vernacular languages to the level of prestige speech forms and assert in the process their cultural and historical specificity, away from the imperious impulses of Arabism. For, despotism is arguably an issue of language, and Arabism's tyranny, as Aflaq and al-Husri have made abundantly clear in their political writings, is tyranny meted out, first linguistically, by way of MSA, before it is inflicted physically. But Arab nationalists, conservative Islamists, and their foreign votaries persist in their efforts to denigrate and repress these "independence" attempts. This is so because "if the Egyptians, the Syrians, the Iraqis, and the rest were to develop their vernaculars into national languages, as the Spaniards, the Italians, and the rest had done in Europe, then all hope of a greater Arab unity would be finally lost."[34] And if that "unity" is lost, then the prevalent narrative of modern Middle East studies—upon which venerable careers, eminent academic departments, and a commanding body of literature have been built—would be stultified and thrown out the window. That explains why al-Husri's ideas

are still so influential within Arab nationalist circles today—from the fossilized mental remains of Arabist ideologues, to university academic programs and arcane professional associations—even as Arab nationalism's death knell has long since been sounded, and even as new generations of Middle Easterners, "former Arabs" and Arab intellectuals, have begun charting a different course for themselves and their peoples, away from the vagaries of Arabism.[35]

Sixty years ago, speaking of the "Lebanese paradox" which, in its cultural and linguistic diversity represented a microcosm of the modern Middle East, Lebanese thinker Michel Chiha wrote that:

> Conquerors and their conquests have all come, gone, and faded away; yet the Lebanese have remained. We are the meeting-place into which peoples flock and assimilate regardless of their origins. We are the crossroads where varied civilizations drop in on one another, and where bevies of beliefs, languages and cultural rituals salute each other in solemn veneration. We are above all a Mediterranean nation, but a nation, like the Mediterranean itself, discerning and sensitive to the stirring music of universal poetry.[36]

This is the Middle East! Not an "Arab world," but a diverse human and cultural space composed of Arabs, to be sure, but teeming with non-Arabs as well, a space with topologies, climates, histories, languages, and geographies favorable to diverse cultural and human compositions, synthesizing centuries of intellectual, linguistic, and ethnonational intercourse and traffic. This is the Middle East that the Lebanese Michel Chiha, Amin Maalouf, Georges Naccache, and Rabih Alameddine, the Palestinian Fawaz Turki and Anton Shammas, the Syrian Adonis and Nizar Qabbani, and the Egyptian Ali Salem, Moustapha Safouan, and Taha Husayn have labored to exhume, rehabilitate, and reveal to itself; a diverse, multiform, polyglot, bastardized cocktail of cultures, peoples, and languages. To the Lebanese, Syrian, Palestinian, Egyptian, and Israeli intellectuals mentioned above, and to others—among them Said Akl, whom this work aims to explore at length—the Middle East is a syncretistic pantheon and a patchwork of hybrid ethnicities, languages, and narratives; a millenarian universe of varied civilizations, including those spawned by Muslims and Arabs, where peoples and times touch and blend *without* dissolving each other, and where languages and histories mesh and fuse *without* getting confused with one another.

We would be ill-served—as would the Middle East itself—if we were to continue referring to it in faulty and ultimately dangerous bromides, as the "Arab world," or the "Muslim world," or even the "Arab Muslim World." As mentioned earlier, the Middle East is certainly home to Muslims and to Arabs. But it is also home, crucible, and progenitor to some of mankind's oldest cultures and civilizations, the remnants of which are

still extant in modern Egyptians, Lebanese, Israelis, Jordanians, Syrians, Palestinians, Iraqis, and others, peoples who see and define themselves in terms different from those of the fashionable labels of modern ideologies.

Georges Naccache

Early twentieth-century Lebanese author, diplomat, and journalist Georges Naccache, through his progressive and inclusive vision of Lebanon, was one such passionate exponent of an expansive, multiform, culturally elastic, Mediterraneanist Middle East. Like many children of his generation, the vision of Lebanon that Naccache championed was one of a millenarian meeting place of peoples, languages, and cultures, impossible to slot into a single, simple, soothing "nationalist" label. Naccache was well at ease with the transparently "bastardized" hybridity of Lebanon's human and cultural anatomy, in perfect harmony with its kindred Levantine and European Mediterranean. In his view, Lebanese diversity provided a broader, more inclusive contextualization of identity, one based on openness and multiplicity rather than on the prevalent national jingoisms and rigidity of his times' Arab nationalist tendencies.

Naccache was particularly unforgiving vis-à-vis Arabism. And although at times sympathetic to some of Arabism's national and cultural claims, acknowledging them to be "natural" and "legitimate" to those who champion them, Naccache denounced what he called Arabism's "limitative" and "exclusivist" proclivities, comparing them to the Inquisition's auto-da-fé.[37] Lebanon's vocation, he claimed, was that of the authentic and exquisitely original peoples of the Eastern Mediterranean; peoples strewn at the crossroads of races and civilizations, perpetual cosmopolitan exiles, eloquent cultural intermediaries, and faithful synthesizers of Western and Eastern cultural values.[38]

Although Naccache was accepting of an emergent Arab literary renaissance and an Arab cultural revival in the Middle East, he vehemently rejected Arabism's negationist impulses and denounced its attempts at stifling the varied cultural, ethnic, and linguistic attributes of the Eastern Mediterranean; attributes which, in his view, were the synthesis of a 6,000-year-old human experience, a Lebanese patrimony and a bequest to the totality of the human race.[39]

It should be noted that in 1924 Georges Naccache was, along with Gabriel Khabbaz, a cofounding editor of the French-language Lebanese daily *L'Orient*. During the 1930s *L'Orient* would become the mouthpiece of Emile Eddé's National Bloc Party, a committed advocate of Lebanese cultural autonomy and a sworn foe of Arab nationalism. *L'Orient* was also a political rival of future Lebanese president Bshaara El-Khoury's camp's newspaper, *Le Jour*, itself the brainchild of another illustrious

Lebanese Mediterraneanist, the poet and banker Michel Chiha. In 1971, both *L'Orient* and *Le Jour* would merge into what would later become Lebanon's leading French-language daily, *L'Orient Le Jour*. Interestingly, Naccache was also, along with future Lebanese president Charles Helou and activists Emile Yared, Chafic Nassif, and Pierre Gemayel, one of the founding pillars of the Lebanese Phalanges Party, which they established in November of 1936, and which in later years would become one of the major political exponents of Lebanese national specificity and Lebanese independence—opposed to the varieties of emerging Arab nationalist movements attempting to relegate Lebanon to the status of a "province" in a projected Arab suprastate.

In 1949, Georges Naccache, along with *L'Orient*'s Editor in Chief, Kesrwén Labaki, was sentenced to a six-month prison term for having dared publish an audacious editorial titled *Deux négations ne font pas une nation*! (*Two Negations Don't Amount to a Nation!*). The essay was a combustive critique of Lebanon's politics of the ostrich and a devastating indictment of Arabs, Arab nationalism, Lebanese Arabists, and the Lebanese national "concession" known as the National Pact—a 1943 political contract establishing Lebanon's "diversity" but recognizing its "Arab face." In Naccache's view, the "two negations"—Lebanon being "neither Eastern nor Western," and "neither Arab nor 'non-Arab'"—were an astute balancing act. But he also viewed that formula to have been a national "deception" and a "paralyzing equilibrium"; a failed attempt at bridging Lebanon's ethnic diversity, which in the end eroded the country's essence and etiolated its true Mediterranean identity—the one based on multiplicity and openness, not on static national monism.[40]

A full year before the publication of *Deux négations ne font pas une nation*, on September 17, 1948, Naccache penned a stirring editorial titled *You Are Certainly What You Are, Lebanon*! In it, he paved the way to the iconic 1949 essay, and elaborated on his Braudelian-Mediterraneanist conception of identity; an idea more expansive and accepting than those advocating an imputed, perhaps contrived, often compulsory Arabic national perception.

On July 21, 2006, in the midst of the Hezbollah-Israel summer war in southern Lebanon, the French weekly *Valeurs Actuelles*, ran an analysis of the Lebanese situation in which political observer Frédéric Pons made use of both of Naccache's late-1940s editorials, employing Naccache's exact language to translate the complexities of Lebanon to his French readers. "What is Lebanon?" Pons wondered, paraphrasing Naccache.[41] "It is a millenarian contradiction resolved on a daily basis, for the past thousand years; a contradiction that still requires a daily resolution."[42] Lebanon is a tiny plot of land populated by seventeen different ethnoreligious communities, each with its own distinctions, specificities, ethnic connotations,

and cultural divergences, predilections and aspirations.[43] The argument Pons was making in the summer of 2006 was essentially the same one advanced by Georges Naccache sixty years earlier. Namely that Lebanon, by its very nature and due to the stunning complexity and diversity of its cultural fabric, cannot be plied or reduced to the will of one exclusive and exclusivist ideology or one restricted and restrictive national narrative and national identity. Speaking to this verity in 1948, Naccache wrote:

> You are definitely what you are, the way you are, O Lebanon! A precious little promontory drawn out of the placid waters [of the Mediterranean], standing sentry in the face of the Ponent [rising sun], hoisting your distinctive outlines above the edge of a restless Asia. O, you, small heap of limestone and marl, pricked by rugged greeneries; what does exactly confer upon you that special distinction? [. . .] Is it because you are this bright speck of light on a barely comprehensible map; a small stain of white and ochre around which revolves a 6,000-year-old story and a timeless history? All of the planet's reflexes clamor and echo within you, making you the world's most sensitive and vibrant meeting place of peoples and cultures. [. . .] They are certainly indigenous to these parts, all these people hailing from all the other "elsewheres," dropping anchor at your shores. [. . .] For as far back as the memory can stretch, you have been [. . .] the meeting place of all of Man's major undertakings. [. . .] O land of pure untamed impulse, what is the secret of your order? What is the secret of your defiant equilibrium? [. . .] A hundred times sentenced to death, you still prove your vibrancy and your life, simply by living. You are this country where, not once in the past twenty-five years, have two official clocks succeeded in marking the same hour; [. . .] where any form of national prerogatives can be vetoed by a mortician and hearse-driver. [. . . Must you] forever look catastrophe in the eye, forever walk on the edge of the abyss, yet never trip over and never fall? [. . .] O Lebanon, O most enchanting mess, O most sweet injustice in a world ravaged by excesses of justice and order.[44]

This is the essence of Lebanon and its multifaceted millenarian identity and history; a cacophony of peoples and narratives, rooted in everlasting motion and change, obstinately clinging to their congenital diversity, relentlessly defiant in the face reductive nationalisms—"morticians" and "hearse-drivers" to use Naccache's pungent image, a clear reference to a sinister and morbid Arab nationalism, impinging on Lebanese sovereignty and smothering its "national prerogatives." Although written some sixty years ago, describing a fledgling modern Lebanese state still reeling from five centuries of Ottoman domination and a quarter century of French Mandatory rule, Naccache's was a theme that still seduces and moves a number of modern Lebanese authors and political thinkers. Amine Maalouf for one, another faithful son of the Mediterranean, is another such thinker. Indeed, Maalouf would dedicate the corpus of his

literary output of the 1980s and 1990s to this same expansive, Mediterraneanist conception of identity as advocated by Naccache and his peers in the Lebanon of the 1920s and 1930s; an identity that validates and celebrates a complex hybridity, a *métissage* or a composite of cultures and languages as Maalouf called it, rather than banal reductive labels and exclusivist, ultimately impoverishing and faulty classifications.

Amin Maalouf

In his 1993 novel *Le rocher de Tanios*, winner of that year's prestigious French Prix Goncourt literary prize, Maalouf pays tribute and pledges fealty to Lebanon's hybridity and complex mosaic of identities. He writes:

> This is my Mountain! It is at once attachment to the ancestral soil and longing for exile; a sanctuary and a passageway in one; a land of milk and honey, and blood; neither Heaven, nor Hell; but rather, Purgatory. [. . .] Many events had come to pass; [my] village had witnessed so many upheavals, so many destructions, so many bruisings, until one day I resolved to surrender to exile. I whispered my regrets to all the ancestors and [. . . I set out to leave.] At my back, the mountain stood near. At my feet lay the valley whence, at nightfall, the all too familiar howling of jackals would soon begin to creep up. And over there, in the distance, I could see the sea; my cramped plot of sea, narrow and distant, ever moving forward, ever rising towards the horizon, like an endless road.[45]

These imageries of roads, seas, and mountains—perpetuity, rootedness, and everlasting fluidity and movement—are of paramount importance to someone as physically, affectively, and intellectually invested in the Mediterranean and Mediterranean culture as Maalouf. The Mediterranean "is above all, a sea ringed round by mountains," and the "mountains [at once] surrounding, strangling, barricading and compartmentalizing the long Mediterranean coastline are the flesh and bones [of the Mediterranean peoples]," wrote Fernand Braudel in his *Memory and the Mediterranean*.[46] For millennia, "the peoples of the Mediterranean have been shaped not only by the sea [. . .], but also by the mountains."[47] This is the predominant theme in Maalouf's oeuvre, in his conception of identity, and in his perception of the composite nature of the inhabitants of the Mediterranean, Mediterranean Lebanon, and the Levant; perpetuity, diversity, and eternal movement. Indeed, Maalouf's work is especially carping—often using jarring language—against those advocates of reductionist identities. He likens them to "howling jackals" in the conclusion of *Le rocher de Tanios*. Jackals symbolize death in ancient Near Eastern mythology—as well as modern Lebanese popular superstitions. A jackal is a hated creature that mulls around graveyards and digs up corpses. It

would be difficult to believe that Maalouf used jackals frivolously—as opposed to, say, the more fearsome wolves or lions—without some sort of symbolism in mind, without intending to condemn orthodoxy and the despotism of jingoistic nationalisms—perhaps with a round of *sous-entendres* sniping at Arabism.

In that same vein, and speaking of his nineteenth-century Lebanese ancestral village in his 2004 self-narrative, *Origines*, Maalouf pokes fun at the stilted and rigid MSA that some members of his own family often ostentatiously paraded on perplexed interlocutors—even as they did not use MSA themselves as a language of daily parlance.[48] Conversely, when speaking of his native village's authentic sui generis speech-form, an elastic and unpretentious mother-tongue, Maalouf affectionately and effusively refers to it as "a country vernacular language with, if that, a very faint relationship to the Arabic language."[49] Indeed, whether in his works of fiction, historical novels, self-narratives, or journalistic output, Amin Maalouf had been one of the most eloquent, most articulate exponents of a blending and multiplicity of identities, identities as a perpetual "work-in-progress" unhindered and uncluttered by linguistic and cultural orthodoxy.[50] His inspiration and world of reference had always been Lebanon. Not because of nostalgic yearnings for it, but because multiform, diverse, "bastardized" Lebanon held in Maalouf's view a more just and a more accurate notion of identity—for Lebanon and the Mediterranean Levant as a whole—than the simplistic uniform perceptions diffused by a stolid normative media and an unoriginal modern Middle East scholarship.

"Others would rather speak to you about 'roots,'" began Maalouf's preface to *Origines* "but not I!"[51]

> I dislike the word "roots," and I dislike the imageries it elicits even more. Roots burrow deep in the soil, they twist and squirm in the mud, they thrive in the darkness, [they] hold the trees above them captive and nourish them by way of blackmail: "You break free, you die!" Trees must resign themselves to this blackmail; trees need their roots; humans don't. We humans breathe the light and yearn for the skies, and when we sink into the ground, we do so only to rot out and die. The sap of our native soil does not reach our heads by way of our feet. Our feet have only one function; they help us walk and move about. The only things that matter to us humans are roads. It is the road that beckons to us and seduces us. [. . .] The road gives us promises, carries us aloft, pushes us forth, and then abandons us. And so we die in the same manner in which we were born, forlorn on the side of a road that we had not chosen.[52]

Not unlike the bulk of his literary corpus, Maalouf's *Origines* is certainly not a denunciation of identity and "roots"; it is simply a celebration of identity as motion and "wings," a testament to the adaptability and versa-

tility of Man, and above all, a tribute to the ecumenical, pantheistic nature of human identities—perhaps more specifically a validation of Lebanon's varied Mediterranean personality. No doubt the 2004 Prix Méditerranée was awarded *Origines* for many reasons, being a testament to Mediterranean culture must certainly have been foremost among those reasons.

Multiplicity and hybridity are a leitmotif and a foundational direction in Maalouf's work. Speaking of Leo Africanus, a fifteenth-century character in his eponymous book, *Léon l'Africain,* Maalouf describes thusly his hero's anthropomorphic cosmopolitan Mediterranean Levant—and, by association, his tiny Lebanon which he holds to be a microcosm of the larger Middle East:

> I, Hasan the son of Muhammad the scale-master, I, Jean-Léon de Médici, circumcised at the hands of a barber and baptized at the hands of a pope, I am now called the African, but I am not from Africa, nor from Europe, nor from Arabia. I am also called the Granadan, the Fezzi, the Zayyati, but I come from no country, from no city, no tribe. I am the son of the road; a wayfarer. My homeland is the caravan; my life the most spectacular of pathways, the most riveting of travels. . . . My wrists have rubbed, in turn, against the caresses of silk, the chafing of wool, the gold of princes and the chains of slaves. My fingers have parted a thousand veils, my lips have made a thousand virgins blush, and my eyes have seen cities die and empires collapse. From my mouth you will hear Arabic, Turkish, Castilian, Berber, Hebrew, Latin and Italian vulgari, because all tongues and all prayers belong to me. But I belong to none of them. I belong only to God and to the earth, and it is to them that I shall one day soon return.[53]

So, Hasan, also known as Leo Africanus, with ties to Granada (Spain), the scion of a noble North African Muslim family, who lived as a homeless penniless exile in Morocco, and as a Catholic aristocrat in the Court of Ferdinand and Isabella, was a circumcised Catholic and a Muslim baptized at the hands of his namesake, Pope Leo X—who incidentally christened Hasan "Léon de Médicis." Not unlike his Lebanese author, the supposedly Muslim Arab North African Moorish European Catholic, was neither Arab, nor African, nor even European, but rather a composite cosmopolitan polyglot, who was intimately familiar with the cultures and ways of Europeans and Arabs alike, and who wielded Arabic, Hebrew, Turkish, Berber, Latin, and its French, Spanish, and Italian vernaculars, with the ease and affection of a native. Like his author, Leo could not be reduced to a simple, politically soothing national label. He was, as Maalouf described himself in his self-narrative, *Origines*, a man "of illusive origins":

> the child of a tribe of eternal vagabonds, wandering off endlessly in a limitless desert, wide as the universe is infinite; [. . .] dwelling in tents disguised

> in costumes made out of rock; holder of varied nationalities that are only a function of random dates in time, or another steamship setting off on a new voyage; sharing only one common denominator [. . .] beyond the generations, beyond the open seas, and beyond the Babel of languages: the rustling sound of [. . . an] identity grounded in mythology that I know to be false, but a mythology that I revere regardless, as if it were my only truth.[54]

This is a canvass set against an infinitely more complex understanding of identity—and a far more broad and fluid perception of the self than demanded by Arab nationalism; a patchwork of cultures, languages, ethnicities, and narratives always in motion, never seduced by facile soothing narrow depictions of singular, homogenized constructs of self-perception. Always a nationality made up of multiple nationalities, always dwelling in a homeland straddling multiple homelands, always a linguistic humanist wielding a "native" language that is a synthesis of multiple languages and the appanage of multiple identities and appurtenances.

Bidding another final farewell to his "home," on the eve of yet another final exile and another final voyage to the land of his birth, Maalouf's hero, Leo Africanus, gives advice to his own son in these final words of *Leo Africanus* the novel, never surrendering to a reductive monochromatic identity, never betraying his cosmopolitan polyglot self:

> Once more, my son, I am borne along by that [Mediterranean] sea [. . .] which is now taking you towards your first exile. In Rome, you were "the son of the Rumi." Wherever you are, some will want to ask questions about your skin or your prayers. Beware of gratifying their instincts, my son, beware of bending before the multitude! Muslim, Jew or Christian, they must take you as you are, or lose you. [. . .] Never hesitate to go far away, beyond all seas, all frontiers, all countries, all beliefs.[55]

Rabih Alameddine

Again, another product of Lebanese hybridity, this time expressed in English, is Rabih Alameddine's *The Hakawati.* Like Lebanon itself, Alameddine's novel is a rich bewitching tapestry of Levantine metaphor that is in a way the very history, memory, and identity of Lebanon itself. In a nutshell, *The Hakawati* is the story of the Kharrat family,[56] their Urfa-Turkey-native patriarch Ismail, the illegitimate love child of a British missionary-physician (Simon Twining, "like the tea") and his Armenian housekeeper (Lucine Guiragossian). In sum, it is the story of Lebanon and the Lebanese, told through the history of a family of "fibsters" and their patriarch, an Armenian-Lebanese Turkish-speaking Anglican-Druze, Ismail Twining-Guiragossian "*hal kharrat*" (*Anglice* "that fibster" or "B.S. artist").

The Hakawati is also the story of Biblical, Homerian, Phoenician, Turkish, Koranic, Ovidian, Christian, Jewish, Muslim, and Pagan Lebanon, in sum, the story of Lebanese diversity, hybridity, and its cocktail of cultures, identities, languages, and civilizations. The very word "hakawati," as Alameddine puts it, conjures up images of "a teller of tales, myths, and fables," deriving from "the Lebanese word 'haki' which means 'talk' or 'conversation'"; this suggests that in the Lebanese language the simple feat of talking connotes weaving a fantasy and concocting a story.[57] By playing around with the semantic connotations of the words "*hakawati*," "*hkayé*," and "*kharrat*," Alameddine was clearly pointing out Lebanon's congenital diversity—and ultimately the futility of trying to pigeon-hole it into an ideologically soothing label, Arab or otherwise. The fact that digging into the etymological origins of his narrator's patronym—*hkayéét, haki, hkayé*—referring to the word's cognates as "Lebanese" *tout court*—as opposed to Lebanese-Arabic or Lebanese "dialectal" words—tells legion of Alameddine's intent to flaunt Lebanon's distinctness, namely its linguistic distinctness and its linguistic humanism (wielding Armenian, Turkish, "Lebanese," English and Arabic). Alameddine could have easily chosen the standard reference to Lebanon's speech-form as a "dialect of Arabic," or "Lebanese-Arabic," or simply Arabic. Opting for "Lebanese" *tout court* was a statement the author was making on behalf of a bona fide "Lebanese" language.

Dealing with the contents of the novel on a more substantive level, Alameddine's juxtaposition of fables as well as Biblical and Koranic narratives with his own family's history, is meant to underline that diversity—as was it multiple jabs at and mockeries of religious orthodoxies and monistic prescriptive identities. The last few pages of the novel are particularly poignant. At one point, clasping the hand of his dying father, the narrator proceeds with a drawn out and detailed narration of the family's history as if to ward off death and buy his father another night among the living. Says he:

> Do you hear me? . . . Do you hear me? I don't know which stories your father told you and which you believed, but I always wondered whether he ever told you the true story of who he is, or the one that seems most true. Did he? [. . .] Your grandmother's name was Lucine. It's true. I checked it out. Lucine Guiragossian. Your grandfather was Simon Twining. . . . See, you have English, Armenian, and Druze blood. Oh, and Albanian, too. You're a man of the world. We always knew that. . . . Your grandmother died while your father was still a baby. Another [Armenian] woman raised him, Anahid Kaladjian. . . . She sent him away when he was eleven. He used to say that all he remembered was that she told him to go south, hide in the mountains of Lebanon, stay with the Christians. . . . Listen. Here's a story you'd like. Your father was born tiny, as tiny as a rat, a *jardown*. No one gave him any hope of living.

> [. . . Yet he] survived, but he didn't grow up to be a giant of a man, no, did he? Like all of us [his descendents], he wasn't even very big. He didn't inherit the subtlety of wine, but the volatility of vinegar. The yogurt gave him not a bitter wisdom but a sour disposition. And the horseshoe turned out to belong not to a horse, but to a mule. . . . So he did end up with the endurance of iron, but also with the stubbornness of a mule. That's your father.[58]

This, Alameddine's Lebanon is a longwinded but fascinating 513-page version of Michel Chiha's Lebanon: a mountain sanctuary for heterodox minorities—"go hide in the mountains of Lebanon, stay with the Christians," says one of Alameddine's characters—a meeting place of peoples and ideas; a thick stew of varied cultures, religions, and languages; "a small country, indeed a very small country; perhaps even a small nation, but certainly a homeland for a race of undying giants"[59] who, like the *Hakawati*, the "teller of tales," were eternally volatile, sour, and stubborn conduits and cultural intermediaries.

ARABISM'S EGYPTIAN RIVALS

Interestingly, as pertains to the modern Middle East as a whole, touting smaller national identities outside the narrow perimeters of Arabness is a theme that is no longer specific to Lebanon. Lebanon and the Lebanese have certainly been pioneers in vaunting non-Arab cultural progenitors, but this is a stance that a bevy of other Middle Eastern peoples have, of late, become more forthright and outspoken about. The Pharaonic movement in Egypt (especially with Ali Salem and Taha Husayn), the Canaanite movement among Israelis, Palestinians, and Israeli-Palestinians (with Fawaz Turki and Anton Shammas), and the neo-Mediterraneanism of Arabic-language poets like Adonis and Nizar Qabbani—have all resurfaced during the latter part of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries—and the aforementioned intellectuals have all begun excavating and rehabilitating their suppressed pre-Arab histories and identities; histories and identities that offer a more inclusive secular alternative to Arabism (and Zionism), and which manifest a genuine interest in the ancient histories and peoples of the Levant—Canaanites, Hebrews, Phoenicians, Egyptian Pharaohs, Assyrians, Armenians, and others.

Ali Salem

One such advocate of Middle Eastern identities antedating and superseding Arabism is the Egyptian playwright Ali Salem. Salem's ideas are very much in tune with the Braudelian Mediterraneanism as showcased

above in the thought and works of Lebanese authors Georges Naccache and Amine Maalouf. It should be noted that one of Ali Salem's prevalent leitmotifs maintains Egypt—that is, the modern "Arab" Republic of Egypt—to be the daughter of Mediterranean Europe, not an Arabian sand-maiden. His work offers a pungent indictment of the insularity and thuggish instincts of nationalism—mainly Arab nationalism of the Sati' al-Husri and Michel Aflaq variety—and attempts to provide an ecumenical Egyptian Mediterraneanism as an alternative. In the short satire excerpted below, *The Odd Man and the Sea*, a verbal duel erupts between an anthropomorphic Arab nationalism and a humanistic Egyptian Mediterraneanism, each trying to convince the other of the validity of their history and their own perception of identity. The outcome, however, is sadly predictable. Predetermined by the story's very title where the "Sea" symbolizes Mediterranean dynamism and fluidity, and the "Odd Man" represents a universalist humanist dreamer branded "odd" and "crazy" for trying—in vain perhaps—to chart a course for himself and his Egyptians away from the repressive impulses of Arab nationalist and Muslim religious orthodoxy. In "The Odd Man and the Sea" Salem describes an interrupted daydream sequence during which, depicting himself as a lover and disciple of the Mediterranean, he would spend long hours staring at its surface:

> looking for the far horizon, as if I wanted to see my neighbors there, in Italy, Greece, Spain, and France. [. . .] We are neighbors, separated by two continents, unified by one sea. [. . . Suddenly,] he appeared. [. . .] He was almost my age, but quite different. His face reflected deep feelings of piety and certainty, while my own betrayed puzzlement and fear of the unknown. He said: "All the people around you are engrossed in doing something useful, why do you sit around doing nothing?"
>
> "I'm thinking, sir."
>
> "Of what?"
>
> "Of the sea, of the Mediterranean."
>
> "Why don't you think of the Red Sea?"
>
> "I don't know it. The few times I went there, I didn't feel any affection toward it. . . ."
>
> "But you feel affection for the Mediterranean?" he asked.
>
> "Yes, it's one of the human rights to love the sea."
>
> A cruel look crept upon his face, I felt restless. Once again he started asking questions.
>
> "Do you feel that you belong to the Mediterranean?"
>
> "Egypt itself is of the Mediterranean," I responded. "One day, thousands of years ago, this sea was just a lake, crossed by ships loaded with thoughts and art toward Greece, carrying the product of minds and souls. [. . .]"
>
> "You didn't mention that you are an Arab," he pointed out.

"The Arabs are my fathers, but the Egyptians are my forefathers; do you advise me to inherit from my fathers and ignore the treasures left to me by my forefathers?" I asked him.

"I don't advise you, I order you" he said![60]

In the main, what Ali Salem attempts to demonstrate in this passage, is his strong belief in—as evidenced by his powerful validation of—identity as a distinct construct distinguished by its very diversity and complexity rather than by its supposedly monistic exclusivism. In extolling diversity, Salem also indicts the insularity and reductionism of Arabism and Islam. "Egypt itself is [the product] of the Mediterranean," he tells his Arabist interlocutor, and the Mediterranean itself is "a lake" linking Egypt to Europe's cultural and intellectual heritage. Unlike Arabism, Salem's Egyptian nationalism—an outcome of a humanistic universalism in his view—is not exclusivist and does not exhibit anti-Arab parochialism—at least not in the manner in which al-Husri's and Aflaq's Arabism negated non-Arabs. "The Arabs are my fathers," Salem concedes to his story's Arabist enforcer, "but the Egyptians are my forefathers."[61] So, in a sense, Salem acquiesces in his kinship to the Arabs, but at the same time he refuses to disengage from his equally—if not more—important non-Arab and pre-Arab ancestry.

In the conclusion of his satire, Salem's narrator is physically taken back in time to nineteenth-century Egypt, where mules are the common mode of transportation, where firewood and candlelight are employed for heating, cooking and lighting, and where the narrator is compelled to seek out the assistance of then Egypt's Ottoman Viceroy, Muhammad Ali Pasha. Besides demonstrating how relinquishing a single component of ones identity—in this case Egypt's non-Arab component—devalues one as a human being and stunts one's ability for movement and progress, this scene brings Egypt's Pasha to the fore as savior and protector of diversity as advocated by Salem's narrator. It should be remembered that Muhammad Ali Pasha is commonly recognized as the father and founder of Modern Egypt. Although a Muslim and an Ottoman subject, the Pasha was not an Arab, nor a native Egyptian for that matter. He was a Macedonian-born ethnic Albanian who never even spoke Arabic. Yet he was credited with the modernization and industrialization of Egypt; he oriented the Egyptian economy toward cotton production; embarked on large-scale building projects (hospitals, schools, roads, bridges, canals, factories); modernized the Egyptian army, and attempted to treat all his subjects equally—most importantly, he brought Coptic Christian Egyptians back to the forefront of Egyptian society after centuries of marginalization, isolation, persecutions, and discrimination. So, in a sense, Salem's narrator appears to have sought out the Pasha's help precisely because of the

latter's reputation as a reformer and a challenge to orthodoxy, and in the hope that there would be intellectual affinity and sympathy between the two to ward off the specter and blunt the tyranny of the Arabist character in the play. But Salem's character quickly learns that reform is costly, that it comes with burdens and responsibilities, and that it demands nothing less than defying authority and orthodoxy head on. Were the modern Egyptians prepared to challenge the Arabists and Islamists among them asked the Pasha? In the end, Salem's character resigns himself to living in the obscurity of the nineteenth century, where he didn't challenge or question tradition, and where tradition did not harass him as long as he quietly submitted to it and toed the line.

But in reality, Salem's ostensible resignation was a pungent statement against the tyranny of Arabism. At one point in the satire, when Salem's narrator inquires whether his Arabist interlocutor was advising him to "inherit from [his Arab] fathers and ignore the treasures left for [him by his Egyptian] forefathers?" the domineering Arabist responds "I do not advise you, I order you!" This is an attitude very much in line with the dogmatism, negationism, and coercion—as national integrators—as advocated by two of the most influential Arab nationalist ideologues of the twentieth century, Michel Aflaq and Sati' al-Husri. Indeed, al-Husri's mantra "you're an Arab if I say so" had become a well nigh cabalistic incantation brandished by Arabist diehards still unable to come to terms with the reality of an ecumenical non-Arab Middle East and still unwilling to reconcile themselves to the authenticity—and perhaps even the endurance—of the modern Middle East's state-system and Middle Eastern state-nationalism.[62]

But Salem, the ever witty and subtle satirist, does not allow Arabism to escape his caustic scalpel unharmed. In the opening paragraphs of *The Odd Man and the Sea*, an Arab nationalism clearly inhospitable to freethinking wonders why Salem's character, who was clearly engrossed in thinking, sat idly by, "doing nothing" of value, while true Arabs were "doing something useful, [. . .] playing dominos, cards and backgammon."[63] Salem's insinuation was that Arabists were submissive besotted automatons, who never questioned authority and never disputed the official line, as if mental exercises and pondering questions of identity and pre-Arab progenitors were dangerous intellectual enterprises in Arab nationalist political thought. Worthy Arabs do not deviate from their "group-think" mentalities; they do "something useful" instead; they play "backgammon, cards and dominoes."[64]

Taha Husayn

Over half a century prior to Ali Salem's *Odd Man and the Sea,* Michel Chiha's Mediterraneanism was summed up in words very similar to Sa-

lem's "do you advise me to inherit from my fathers and ignore [. . .] my forefathers?" Chiha wrote in 1942 that

> the past fifteen centuries [of Lebanon's history, presumably fifteen centuries of Arab domination], should not make [the Lebanese] oblivious or disrespectful of the fifty centuries that preceded them! [. . .] Even if relying entirely on conjecture, the blood, the civilization, and the language of today's Lebanese cannot possibly be anything other than the legacy and synthesis of fifty centuries of progenitors and ancestors.[65]

But in addition to their obvious Lebanese "inspiration," Ali Salem's ideas did have indigenous Egyptian progenitors; more exactly in the form of a local Mediterraneanism that flourished in Egypt of the 1920s and 1930s, and which was propounded through the person and works of what some consider the doyen of modern Arabic literature, Taha Husayn. Indeed, even by today's standards, the ideas advocated by Husayn during the 1930s were considered radical and revolutionary. Claiming Egypt, as Husayn did, to the millenarian tradition of ancient Mediterranean Greece and Rome, and disengaging it from the East and Araby, bordered almost on blasphemy against both Arabism and Islam. Egypt is not only a Western nation, claimed Husayn, it is the crucible, progenitor, and cradle of Western civilization. Unlike Ali Salem, Taha Husayn was an educator as well as a man of letters and public intellectual; he did not feel the need to rely on works of satire and allegory, and elude "the authorities" and their prevalent orthodoxies, in order to drive his ideas across. Husayn was, at different times through the 1940s and 1950s, an Egyptian public official, founding Rector of the University of Alexandria, and Minister of Education. He articulated his ideas plainly and unequivocally by building school curricula, publishing works of cultural pedagogy and social criticisms, as well as through works of literature with social and political content. Husayn believed that Egyptian culture and Arab culture were irreconcilable polar opposites, stressing that Egypt's only path to modernity and progress was through disengaging it from its imposed Arab history, shedding its alien Arab acquisitions and reclaiming its ancient Pharaonic, Greek, and Roman Mediterranean past. There exists no scientific basis for Egypt's purported Arabness, argued Husayn. Pharaonism is deeply anchored in the souls of Egyptians and will forever remain so, he claimed, "an Egyptian is an Egyptian first and foremost [. . . and] he will never relinquish his Egyptian identity, no matter what the circumstances."[66]

In his *The Future of Culture in Egypt,* his magnum opus published in 1939 and was meant as a set of guidelines for educational reform in Egypt, Husayn attempted to define Egyptian identity and placed it squarely at the center of European-Mediterranean heritage. He wrote that:

At the outset we must answer this fundamental question: is Egypt of the East or of the West? Naturally, I mean East or West in the cultural, not the geographical sense. It seems to me that there are two distinctly and bitterly antagonistic cultures on the earth. Both have existed since time immemorial, the one in Europe, the other in the Far East. We may paraphrase the question as follows: Is the Egyptian mind Eastern or Western in its imagination, perception, comprehension, and judgment? More succinctly put—which is easier for the Egyptian mind: to understand a Chinese or Japanese, or to understand an Englishman or a Frenchman? This is the question that we must answer before we begin to think of the foundations on which we shall have to base our culture and education. It seems to me that the simplest way to do this is by tracing the complicated development of the Egyptian mind from earliest times to the present.

. . . The Egyptian mind had no serious contact with the Far Eastern mind; nor did it live harmoniously with the Persian mind. The Egyptian mind has had regular, peaceful, and mutually beneficial relations only with the Near East and Greece. In short, it has been influenced from earliest times by the Mediterranean Sea and the various peoples living around it. [. . .] The ancient Egyptian mind is not an Eastern mind [. . .] It developed in Egypt as a result of the conditions, natural and human, that prevailed there [in Egypt.] It only exerted influence on and was in turn influenced by the neighboring non-Egyptian peoples, principally the Greeks.

From these clear and long since proven facts, Egyptians have deduced the weird and illogical conclusion that they are Easterners not merely in the geographical sense of the term, but in mentality and culture. They regard themselves as being closer to the [Easterners] than to the Greeks, Italians, and Frenchmen. I have never been able to understand or accept this shocking misconception. I still recall the astonishment I felt several years ago when I became familiar with the activities of a group in Egypt that called itself the "Eastern Link Association" and sought to promote contacts with the peoples of the Far East rather than with the peoples of the Near West. I clearly, indeed intuitively, understand our consciousness of the positive relationships existing between us and the Near East [. . .] because of geographical propinquity as well as similarity of origin and historical evolution. When we go beyond the Near East, however, these factors no longer obtain, except for religion and temporary considerations of a political or economic nature. History shows that religious and linguistic unity do not necessarily go hand in hand with political unity, nor are they the props on which states rely.[67]

So, not only is Egypt not Arab in Husayn's definition of Egyptian identity, but its cultural affinities lay with the ancient and modern civilizations of Europe, Canaan, Phoenicia, and the rest of the Mediterranean—in other words France, Britain, Italy, and Greece, not the Arab Middle East, to which Husayn refers euphemistically as the "East" and the "Far East." Egyptian kinship and contacts with the "Near East" are admissible in Husayn's estimation—perhaps mainly because Greece is traditionally

considered to be part of that official "Near East," but also because other Near Eastern neighbors of Egypt's in Husayn's times, Lebanese and Israelis, were already harking back to non-Arab, Canaanite, Phoenician, and Hebrew progenitors during the 1920s and 1930s.

Husayn's most brazen attempt at severing Egypt from its Arab accretions touches on the issue of language. Under the guise of advocating for a "reformation" of the "Classical" Arabic language—in other words calling for its rehabilitation, modernization, secularization and simplification, as well as ending its monopolization by clerics who have "confiscated it"—Husayn well-nigh declares Arabic to be a dead language and calls for relinquishing it. Said he:

> Arabic [MSA] in Egypt is now virtually a foreign language. Nobody speaks it at home or school or the streets or in clubs; it is not even used in [the] Al-Azhar [Islamic university] itself. People everywhere speak a language that is definitely not Arabic, despite the partial resemblance to it. Throughout the Near East there are a number of cultivated people who understand, read, and write classical Arabic well (in the main not Azhar graduates.) However, even of these the majority cannot speak it fluently. When you write a book for the masses you have to simplify your grammar and syntax considerably [use colloquialisms] in order to be fully understood. If we were to test the capacity of so-called literates to understand the meaning of a chapter by some contemporary author, the results would be painful and ludicrous.[68]

Husayn asserts that the language commonly referred to as Arabic, both MSA and Classical, "is a foreign language" to Egyptians; a language that "nobody speaks." His reference to Egypt's spoken language being "definitely not Arabic," and the invitation he extends to Egyptian intellectuals to write in a language "fully understood" by the masses is a clear articulation of his rejection of MSA as a national language and a call for its replacement by vernacular Egyptian—even as he continued to write in MSA himself. Husayn even makes the argument that the Arabic language is an inadequate learning tool unfit as a vehicle for progress and modernity. Indeed he pokes at the heart of a traditional Egyptian education system that does not address its young learners in their "native language," namely in the Egyptian vernacular, and that produces ostensibly "literate" users of MSA who cannot even use MSA "at home or school or the streets or in clubs." "Although Arabic is part of the basic educational syllabus that is obligatory for everyone" says Husayn:

> very few people have been able to master its intricacies. Even fewer are prepared to spend years learning the rules of grammar only to find ultimately

> that their knowledge is imperfect. An educational system that does not teach the youth to read and write *their native language* well is a mockery.[69]

Not only does Husayn call for the normalization of Egypt's spoken demotic language, he also goes as far as demanding the Arabic script and the Arabic writing system itself be done away with:

> . . . we should do something about our system of writing which leads the people to make so many errors. [. . .] People should read in order to understand, not understand in order to read. The [Egyptian] writing system must be made to serve the cause of clarity, to render sounds accurately and fully, with due regard for speed and economy of effort. [We must] proceed cautiously in this matter and begin by organizing a competition throughout the world, setting up technical committees to decide what reforms may be adopted lest it arouse angry opposition for that reason. The reform of Arabic writing is, however, a fundamental step in the reform of education.[70]

It should be noted that Husayn was not the lone Middle Easterner flirting with the idea of "reforming" the Arabic script—a reform that constituted the underpinnings of his more important battle; the normalization and intellectualization of "colloquial" Egyptian, and ultimately the "de-Arabization" of Egypt. Husayn lived in societies, and interacted with intellectual elites that were already imbued in the Kemalist project in Turkey. The linguistic modernization, secularization, and scriptal Romanization venture that Mustapha Kemal Ataturk embarked upon in Turkey during the 1920s had the double purpose of simplifying Turkish writing—and consequently democratizing literacy, to be sure—but it, more importantly, sought to sever modern Turkey's linguistic, cultural, and religious ties with its Muslim-Arab past. Similarly, the linguistic and scriptal "reforms" that Taha Husayn was advocating in his *The Future of Culture in Egypt* were part and parcel of his "de-Arabization" project, although he did remain wary as to not overly offend Arabic-language purists, Arab nationalists, and Muslim traditionalists still beholden to the presumptive purity and sanctity of the Arabic language. Consequently, all the while calling on Egyptians to adopt their spoken vernacular as a national language and urging a "reformation" of the Arabic writing system, Husayn made sure to document his—perhaps feigned—opposition to an outright Romanization of the Arabic script. After all, he was the "doyen of Arabic literature" and presumably a champion of its writing instrument, the Arabic script, not a herald of its doom.

But one wonders what kind of scriptal reform Husayn could have been advocating, if not outright Romanization. Could he have been suggesting the adoption of Nagari? Chinese Characters? Hieroglyphics? After all, he

felt very strongly about this scriptal "reform" and the replacement of the Arabic writing system, but he still seemed to feign resistance to Romanization, all the while maintaining that a reformation now would

> obviate the necessity for resorting to the solution found by the Turks, namely, replacement of Arabic alphabet with the Latin. Although many people approve this idea, I have resisted and always will resist the use of Latin letters for several reasons which I do not propose to take up here.[71]

Husayn appeared to be prevaricating here, placating and paying lip service to traditionalists and defenders of the Arabic script, but at the same time warning them that Romanization is looming were they to persist in clinging to the obsolete and knotty Arabic script. He argued that for reasons he did not wish to mention he will "always resist the use of Latin letters" for rendering the Arabic language (or the Egyptian "dialect") in writing. But his "resistance" here does not seem to stem from conviction as much as it was a sign of stonewalling and delaying. Mentioning Romanization (the "Latin letters") and then "resisting" seems to suggest that the idea was already being deliberated at the time of Husayn's writing—and as we shall see later in this work, was being seriously considered by some of his cohorts. Then again, Husayn cautions his readers that were scriptal reforms to tarry on, Romanization would become all but certain, as if inexorably ordained. Said he, "such resistance [to Romanization], however strong, will not be enough unless we hasten to modify the writing system and thus overcome the arguments of those who propose a radical [Romanization] solution."[72] Again, one wonders what kind of a "modification" Husayn was alluding to, if not Romanization. As a committed and meticulous educator, he certainly was not referring to pictograms, but rather aiming for an honest simplification and popularization of writing, and consequently for a true democratization of literacy. It seems that Romanization would have been the most logical solution here; clipped, simple, and elegant twenty-six Latin symbols seem to trump the burdensome six hundred Arabic ones anytime.[73] We should "stop fooling ourselves," said Taha Husayn, "by making a virtue of necessity, [and by] reform[ing] a [defective] system of reading and writing."[74] Clarity, simplicity, accuracy, and functionality; those were the main features of the efficient writing system that Husayn was alluding to and advocating for: "The writing system must be made to serve the cause of clarity, to render sounds accurately and fully, with due regard for speed and economy of effort."[75] If the intimation in Husayn's semantics here were not for the adoption of the Roman script, then it certainly appears to be not exactly for preserving the Arabic one either. Like all conscientious Middle Eastern reformers, Husayn remained—even if only psychologically—beholden to the presumed

sanctity of the Arabic language, and was easily intimidated and bullied by the wardens of Arab nationalism. To him, balancing his reformist instincts against the pressures and coercive tactics of Arabist apparatchiks—intellectuals and ruffians alike—was a matter of survival—literally, literarily, and metaphorically.[76] In the end, Taha Husayn's balancing act, like that of many others who followed in his reticent footsteps, doomed to failure what might have been initially a noble enterprise.

ARABISM'S SYRIAN RIVALS

Although the Lebanese and Egyptian opponents of the Arabist narrative professed and advocated for an undivided allegiance respectively to Lebanon and Egypt, completely rejecting Arabism or a national identity smacking—even if only tenuously—of an Arab character or Arab history, there were a number of Syrian rivals of Arabism who were initially Arab nationalists, but who ultimately had a change of heart. The most illustrious among those Syrians were Ali Ahmad al-Said (Adonis), and Nizar Qabbani.

Nizar Qabbani

Although recognized as the Arab world's leading feminist and advocate of women's rights, Nizar Qabbani's post 1967 poetry turned into anti-Arab vitriol and a violent response to the Arabs' defeat in the 1967 Arab-Israeli war; a virulent indictment of Arab politics and culture. Qabbani was actually one of very few Arab intellectuals to have referred to this 1967 event as a "defeat," avoiding the traditional Arab escapisms and euphemisms painting it as a "tragedy" or a "setback," and therefore something "written" (Ar. *maktoub*) and fated, that the Arabs could not have possibly avoided. It should be mentioned that there exists a tendency, generally among Middle Easterners as a whole, but certainly among Arabs, to avoid calling certain events and circumstances by their names—especially as concerns negative or ominous events—as if to exorcise them, ward them off, or wish them away. By way of this sort of semantic witchcraft, a verbal talisman of sorts, fearsome or undesirable circumstances or facts of life are occulted and averted—even if only perceptually and psychologically. Cancer the illness for instance, is never referred to by name in Arabic, but rather always by way or circumlocutions and verbal amulets like, "that unnamed illness," or "that unnamed thing, may He keep it far from us." Physical intimacy and sexuality being at the forefront of the Arabs' taboo topics, are also referred to euphemistically as "that thing," and more formally as "the practice," or

"the act." By the same token, the state of Israel, among Arabs, is almost never referred to by name directly, but rather through euphemisms and attributes, often derogatory attributes such as "the entity," "the scourge," and "the Zionist presence"—but again by way of "protective" amulets, as if to exorcize Israel, ward it off, and wish it away.

Although Qabbani would remain until his death in 1998 true to his reputation as an engaged feminist and a pungent critic of Arab misogyny and the Arabs' hyper-virile mentality, his post-1967 works were primarily an all-out assault on all features of Arab life; from its political, to its social, linguistic, religious, familial, and intellectual facets. And although Qabbani's panacea to the Arabs' ills never explicitly called for the abandonment of the Arabic language—as did Husayn and others among Qabbani's contemporary reformists—he was persuaded that no political, cultural, and social issues can be addressed in the Arab world without a radical linguistic overhaul. He mocked Arab traditions and advocated for a complete break with the Arabs' past, their history, and their language. Yet he never himself abandoned that language—nor did he explicitly disown his own Arabness, or if he did, it was more out of frustration and resentment rather than conviction. Instead, Qabbani set out to demolish the Arabs' infatuation with language—and "stilted semantics" as he called it—working hard to write in a pellucid, simple, fluid language—bordering on the dialectal—rather than stick to the traditional verbiage and semantic wizardry of traditional Arab intellectuals, politicians, and orators. Still, he did all that in Arabic.

In June of 1967, in the aftermath of the Six-Day War, Qabbani wrote a poem titled *Marginalia on the Notebook of Defeat*, where he lamented dilapidated Arab culture and the Arabic language, which he referred to as the language of "abuse and depravity," and which he ultimately judged to be not a language at all, wondering "what value has the people who have no tongue?" (that is, no language). He wrote in his *Maginalia*:

> My friends, I bring you news of the death of our old language and our old books,/ I bring you news of the death of our hollow vocabulary and our abusive word-lists of debauchery, defamation, and insult./ I bring you news of the death of the ideas that led us on the road to defeat./ [. . .] We mustn't be surprised by our defeat on the battlefield,/ for, we wage our wars armed with the Oriental's knack for oration and verbiage, bravado and rhetorical arm-flexing [. . .]/ It pains me to listen to your News in the morning./ It pains me to listen to your barking. [. . .] Five thousand years./ and we're still languishing in the dungeon . . ./ with overgrown beards, a curious and unknown currency,/ and eyes that have become harbors for maggots and flies./ My friends: [. . .] why don't you try to cleanse your thoughts and wash your clothes?/ My friends: why don't you try to read a book?/ Better yet, why not try writing a book for once?/ [. . .] Try sailing to the lands of snows

> and fog . . ./ People beyond your dungeon don't know who you are . . ./ People must think you're some curious breed of beast . . ./ [. . .] Our souls are bankrupt./ Our days are spent idly, engaging in witchcraft rituals,/ playing chess, or slumbering. . . . We memorize and regurgitate verses mindlessly. [. . .] We praise like frogs./ we curse like frogs./ we make our thugs into heroes./ and we dismiss our righteous as crooks and villains. . . . We mill around our mosques./ torpid, shiftless, indolent . . ./ We write pointless poetry,/ we contrive corny proverbs . . ./ And we beg Allah to hand us victory and withhold it from our enemy . . ./ [. . .] because half of our people have no tongue. What value has the people who have no tongue?[77]

This speaks not only to the despair of the Arabs after the 1967 defeat. It indicts the Arabs' lack of initiative, indolence, stagnation, and cultural backwardness, all of which Qabbani attributes to the loss of language; the loss of tongue. Yet Qabbani's poetry is not all about gloom and sorrow; it is more about anger and annoyance with the Arabs and their language; a language that is more instrument of flattery and submission than it is a tool of dynamism and movement. In the mid-1990s, a few years before his death, Qabbani appeared to have completely lost patience with Arabic culture and abandoned all faith in the possibility of its redemption. In 1996 he penned a devastating denunciation of the Arabs, begging for someone to write their obituary (already), and personally hand-deliver him the news of their death. This was in many ways reminiscent of the "obituary" he had penned himself in 1967—announcing the "death of [the] old language and [the] old books" of the Arabs—but it seems that in 1996 Qabbani was seeking "independent confirmation" that the "dilapidated culture" for which he had written the requiem in 1967, was indeed dead and buried and completely done away with. *When Will Someone Finally Announce the Death of the Arabs?* was Qabbani's entreaty for that "independent confirmation?" He wrote:

> I've been trying, since my very early beginnings,/ to be different from you all,/ to shun your stilted pre-packaged, hollow language,/ to shun the worship of your idols,/ to set fire to your Texts,/ to set fire to the language you have forced me to wear!/ But some of our poetry is a graveyard,/ and some of our language, a funerary shroud./ I've been trying to set myself free from your stifling semantics,/ from the curse of the 'Subject and Predicate'[78] . . ./ I've been trying to scrub the dust of your dead language off of my skin,/ cleanse my face with rain-water . . ./ and free myself from the tyranny of your sands . . ./ So long Qureish,/ So long Kulayb,/ So long Mudar![79]/ [. . .] And I erased all the ancient wars/ between women and men,/ between doves, and those who slay doves,/ and between marble and those who lacerate the whiteness of marble . . ./ But, alas, they shut down my lovers' sanctuary,/ and they told me that passion is unbecoming of the History of the Arabs,/ unbecoming of the chastity of the Arabs,/ unbecoming of the

> patrimony of the Arabs!/ Amazing, those Arabs!! [. . .] Through poetry, I've been trying to grapple with the impossible . . ./ I've been trying to plant date-palms,/ But people in my land/ uproot the date-palms . . . / [. . .] I've been trying to love you, my beloved . . ./ Trying to love you clear of all rituals,/ past all Texts,/ and outside all Shari'as and systems of laws . . . [. . .] For the past fifty years,/ I've been writing down my impressions . . . [. . .] But all I could see was Arabism,/ on display at an old-furniture auction . . ./ yet, alas, I could see no Arabs.[80]

Beginning with his opening stanza, Qabbani declares the Arabs to be nonextant. Yet he never loses faith and persists in searching for them, attempting to revive them, even trying his hand at sketching out an adumbration of what they might have been, what they could have been—a united people, free of phobias, tolerant of others around them, respectful of women, uninhibited by "*Shari'as*" and restrictive "systems of laws," impulsive, liberated, unhindered by the constraints of language and tradition. Alas, Qabbani admits, his Arabs still eluded him, like a mirage fading out in the quicksands of the desert, like an illusion that had appeared real in the fleeting trance of a dream, but that actually never was. Qabbani would finally resign himself to the reality that the Arabs were some odd antiquarian's curiosity, unworthy of being preserved—let alone being revived—"on display at an old-furniture auction," where no Arabs were anywhere in sight.

Perhaps the most disturbing of all of Qabbani's indictments of the Arabs, Arab nationalism, and the Arabic language, was one of his final poems, written shortly before his death in 1998, titled *I Reject You.* In it, he says:

> I reject you, all of you,/ This is the end of dialogue . . ./ My language has despaired of you/ And I have set fire to my clothes,/ and I have set fire to your language and your lexicons . . ./ I want out of your poetry/ and out of your tedious literature . . ./ I want out of my voice,/ I want out of my writings,/ I want out of my place of birth,/ out of your cities of salt/ and out of your hollow poetry of clay . . . / [. . .] I planted poetry in your barren wombs/ but you muffled and choked up my rimes . . ./ [. . .] I did try to uproot you from your [. . .] tedious language and your silly myths and lore . . ./ [. . .] I did try to save you from the moving sands swallowing you by day and by night . . ./ [. . . And] I tried to plant nails into your dead skins,/ but I despaired of your skins/ and I despaired of my nails,/ and the thickness of your walls[81]

This is clearly a final good-bye and final despaired cri de coeur of a broken despondent man; a prisoner of a culture and a language that he clearly loved, but a culture and a language that have failed him many times over, and from which he had labored feverishly to disengage—all in vain. But

even as he wrote in exquisitely disturbing and angry MSA; and even as he set alight his verses, his old books, his clothes and all that connected him to the Arabs; even as he begged to be let go from the embrace of the Arabic language, its literature, and its voice, Qabbani remained chained to all these facets of Arabic culture, as if in an eternal lover's embrace. After all, as Fawaz Turki has shown earlier in this work, "Tradition is tradition. It takes as long to remove as it had taken to create."

Adonis

Adonis (born Ali Ahmad al-Said) is another Syrian—and perhaps the world's best known Arabic-language poet today—to have virulently indicted his culture and risen against it. Like Qabbani and his Egyptian and Lebanese cohorts, Adonis argued that the Arab peoples—and Middle Easterners as a whole—are ailing, and that the source of their ailment was essentially their Arabic Language. Even Adonis's nom de plume, borrowed from Phoenician and Greek mythology, was adopted as advocacy for death and renewal, as if a culture's revival can be actuated only by slaying all the elements of its previous retrogressive existence; from its language, to its cultural and social rituals.

Where Qabbani poured scorn and rage on the illusions and failures of Arab culture—all the while embracing "the nation" and attempting to breathe new life into it—Adonis sought to rediscover "the self," the nation as it were, by embracing "the other," by espousing diversity. Adonis criticized the exclusivist religious ethos of Arab societies—not spirituality, but religion, and more specifically "organized religion"—and advocated for a "coming together" of all of the cultures of the Middle East—Arabs, Phoenicians, Egyptians, Christians, Jews, and others—in a civilizational, linguistic, and ethnoreligious amalgam.

Adonis was critical of Arabism and Arab nationalism in that he viewed in them a negationist ethos, an instinct that rejected "the other," denied the legitimacy of "the other," and refused to "reflect on the other" in language, temperament, and social habits. Arab culture, claimed Adonis, was one "completely closed on itself," incompatible with the Middle East's richly textured layers of identities. In one of his most recent French-language works, Adonis maintained that:

> In the Arab world, one can no longer write. People and intellectuals are harking back to a closed, blinkered, repetitive kind of culture, where there is nary an opening to the outside, where the only "other" is Evil, Hell, Satan [Israel, America . . .]. The prevalent logic is the following: "you are either like me, or you're nothing." Distinctness and plurality are not accepted, let alone are they celebrated. Arabs during the ninth and tenth centuries used to say: "I am the

> alterity, the otherness, the distinctness, the distinction." Instead of saying [in the words of the French child-poet Arthur Rimbaud] "Je est un Autre" [the "self" is "otherness"], the Arabs used to say "the other" is "myself." Today, there is a return among Arabs, towards the negationist "I" which refuses "the other," as if "the other" is not in the image of "the self."[82]

This Arabist jingoism is a sort of "cultural pollution" claims Adonis, whereby Arabs condone and submit to a "cultural obscurantism" institutionalized by way of a language—presumably MSA—and a religious traditionalism in symbiosis with the Arabic language.[83] While Qabbani rung out the Arabs' obituary and sought to erase the traces of language and tradition that bound them to him, Adonis simply declared them to be extinct, like the ancient "Sumerians, Greeks, and Pharaohs."[84] He confessed in a recent interview that he was:

> no longer able to understand what is happening in Arab society today. I am unable to interpret this situation, except by way of making the following hypothesis: When I look at the Arab world, with all its resources, the capacities of Arab individuals [. . .] and I compare what they have achieved over the past century with what others have achieved in that same period, I would have to say that we Arabs are in a phase of extinction, in the sense that we no longer have a creative presence in the world. [. . .] We have become extinct. [. . .] A people becomes extinct when it no longer has a creative capacity and the capacity to change the world around it. [. . .] The great Sumerians became extinct, the great Greeks became extinct, and the Pharaohs became extinct. The clearest sign of this extinction is when we intellectuals continue to think in the context of this extinction. [. . .] That is our real intellectual crisis. We are facing a new world with ideas that no longer exist, and in a context that is obsolete. We must sever ourselves completely from that context, on all levels, and think of a new Arab identity, a new culture, and a new Arab society.[85]

The "obsolete context" of which Adonis is talking is clearly the one embodied in the traditions, intellectual output, religious and cultural references, and creative energy of the Arabs, all conveyed by way of a dead language, MSA; dead stuff transmitted by way of a dead idiom, as shown by Fouad Ajami.[86]

That is why linguistic humanism is one of the recurrent themes in this work, and that is why Lebanon—an avid practitioner of cultural and linguistic hybridity—is used as a case study. For, again, only an honest recognition of the Middle East's diversity, heterogeneity, and multiplicity of cultures can lead to a clearer, more accurate, and less dogmatic awareness and understanding of the region. This could in turn pave the way to lasting peace and acceptance in a part of the world symbolized by conflict and intolerance.

NOTES

1. René Descartes, *Discours de la méthode* (Paris: Edition G. F., 1966), 95.

> *Et si j'écris en français, qui est la langue de mon pays, plutôt qu'en latin, qui est celle de mes précepteurs, c'est à cause que j'espère que ceux qui ne se servent que de leur raison naturelle toute pure jugeront mieux de mes opinions que ceux qui ne croient qu'aux livres anciens. Et pour ceux qui joignent le bon sens avec l'étude, lesquels seuls je souhaite pour mes juges, ils ne seront point, je m'assure, si partiaux pour le latin, qu'ils refusent d'entendre mes raisons, parce que je les explique en langue vulgaire.*

2. See the United Nations Development Programme's *Arab Human Development Report 2002* (New York: United Nations Publications, 2002), 51.
3. Elie Kedourie, "Not So Grand Illusions," in *New York Times Review of Books*, vol. 9, no. 9 (Nov. 23, 1967).
4. Milton Esman and Itamar Rabinovich, *Ethnicity, Pluralism, and the State in the Middle East* (Ithaca, N.Y. and London: Cornell University Press), 4.
5. Bernard Lewis, *The Middle East: A Brief History of the Last 2000 Years* (New York: Scribner), 246–47.
6. See Franck Salameh's "Arab Nationalism Run Rampant at Middlebury," in *Real Clear Politics,* August 18, 2006, www.realclearpolitics.com/articles/2006/08/arab_nationalism_run_rampant_a.html (12 Dec. 2008).
7. Bernard Lewis, *From Babel to Dragomans: Interpreting the Middle East* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 2.
8. Bernard Lewis, "The Political Map of the Middle East: A Guide to the Perplexed," *The American Scholar,* vol. 58, no. 1 (Winter 1988–1989), 19–20.
9. Lewis, "Political Map," 20.
10. Lewis, *Babel to Dragomans*, 3
11. Raymond G. Gordon, *Ethnologue: Languages of the World* (Dallas, Tex.: SIL International, 2005), www.ethnologue.com/show_language.asp?code=arb (1 Mar. 2009).
12. Samar Farah, "So You'd Like to Learn Arabic: Got a Decade or So?" *Christian Science Monitor*, 17 January 2002.
13. See Franck Salameh's "Privileging the Vernacular," in *Middle East Quarterly*, vol. XIV, no. 2 (Spring 2007): 85–86.
14. Kees Versteegh, "History of Arabic Language Teaching," in Kassem Wahba, et al., *Handbook for Arabic Language Teaching Professionals in the 21st Century* (London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2006), 7.
15. Efraim Karsh, *Empires of the Sand: The Struggle for Mastery in the Middle East, 1789–1923* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), 2–3.
16. Farah, "So, You'd Like to Learn Arabic."
17. Farah, "So, You'd Like to Learn Arabic." Reflecting this sociolinguistic reality—though, admittedly *not* necessarily sensitive to the ideological predilections of Arabist orthodoxy—reference to "users of Arabic" will be made throughout this work, in lieu of the traditional "Arabic speakers."
18. Bernard Lewis, *The Multiple Identities of the Middle East* (New York: Schocken Books, 1998), 40–41.

19. Lewis, *Multiple Identities*, 31.

20. Martin Kramer, "Arab Nationalism: Mistaken Identity," *Daedalus* (Summer 1993), 171–206.

21. William Safran, "Nationalism," in Joshua A. Fishman, ed., *Handbook of Language and Ethnic Identity* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 77–78.

22. See, for instance, *The Prophet* (1923), *Jesus, the Son of Man* (1928), and *The Garden of the Prophet* (1931).

23. Kamal Salibi, *Maronite Historians of Mediaeval Lebanon* (Beirut, Lebanon: American University of Beirut, 1959), 31–32.

24. It can be argued that even the language of Nagib Mahfouz' Modern Standard Arabic texts appear to be adapted to Colloquial Egyptian. See, for instance, *The Mockery of the Fates* (1939), *Rhadopis* (1943), *The Struggles of Thebes* (1944), and *Khufu's Wisdom*, *Akhenaten: In Truth Dewller* (1985), and *Voices from the Other World: Egyptian Tales* (2002).

25. See, for example, Kees Versteegh, *The Arabic Language* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2001), 48, 57–58.

26. Niloofar Haeri, *Sacred Language, Ordinary People: Dilemmas of Culture and Politics in Egypt* (New York: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2003), 3, 38–39.

27. Farah, "So, You'd Like to Learn Arabic."

28. Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitariansim* (San Diego, New York, and London: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1979), 223–24.

29. Abu Khaldun Sati' al-Husri, *Abhaath Mukhtaara fii al-Qawmiyya al-'Arabiyya* (Beirut, Lebanon: Markaz Diraasaat al-Wihda al-'Arabiyya, 1985), 80.

30. Lewis, *Multiple Identities,* 53.

31. Michel Aflaq, *Fii Sabiil al-Baath* (Beirut: Dar at-Tali'a, 1963), 67–70.

32. See Kanaan Makiya's *Republic of Fear: The Politics of Modern Iraq* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 206.

33. Aflaq, *Fii Sabiil al-Baath*, 40–41; see also Makiya, *Republic of Fear,* 206.

34. Makiya, *Republic of Fear*, 206.

35. See, for example, Franck Salameh's "Middlebury's Arabic Morass," *Middle East Quarterly,* vol. XIII, no. 3 (Summer 2006), 39–46, and "How the Arabs Compare: Arab Human Development Report," *Middle East Quarterly*, vol. IX, no. 1 (Fall 2002), 59–67. See also *Adeed Dawisha's Arab Nationalism in the Twentieth Century* (2003), and Martin Kramer's *Arab Awakening and Islamic Revival* (1996).

36. Michel Chiha, *Visage et présence du Liban*, 2ÈME édition (Beyrouth: Le Cénacle libanais, 1984), 49.

37. Georges Naccache, "Nationalisme culturel, renaissance arabe, autodafés . . . ," in *Un rêve Libanais, 1943–1972* (Paris: Editions FMA, 1983), 35.

38. Naccache, *Un rêve*, 36.

39. Naccache, *Un rêve*, 36, 49.

40. Naccache, "Deux négations ne font pas une nation," in *Un rêve*, 55–56.

41. Frédéric Pons, "Le conflit en trois questions," in *Valeurs Actuelles* (Paris: 21 July, 2006): 27.

42. Pons, "Le Conflit," 27. See also Naccache's *Un rêve,* "Deux négations," 55–56.

43. Pons, "Le conflit," 27.

44. Naccache, *Un rêve*, 49–50.
45. Amin Maalouf, *Le rocher de Tanios* (Paris: Grasset, 1993), 276–77.
46. Fernand Braudel, *Memory and the Mediterranean* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 2001), 4–5.
47. Braudel, *Memory*, 5.
48. Amin Maalouf, *Origines* (Paris: Editions Grasset, 2004), 34.
49. Maalouf, *Origines*, 34.
50. In addition to *Le rocher de Tanios*, see for instance *Léon l'Africain, Identitées meurtrières,* and *Origines.*
51. Maalouf, *Origines*, 7.
52. Maalouf, *Origines*, 7.
53. Maalouf, *Léon l'Africain* (Paris: J. C. Lattès, 1986), 9.
54. Maalouf, *Origines*, 8.
55. Amin Maalouf, *Leo Africanus* (Chicago: New Amsterdam, Ivan R. Dee, Publisher, 1988), 360.
56. In Lebanese, the word "kharrat," which is a common patronym, means "fibbster" or "fabricator," in sum, a storyteller, a *Hakawati.*
57. Rabih Alameddine, *The Hakawati* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 2008), 36.
58. Alameddine, *Hakawati,* 511–13.
59. Charles Corm, *La montagne inspirée* (Beyrouth: Editions de la Revue Phénicienne, 1987), 104.
60. Ali Salem, "The Odd Man and the Sea," *Beirut Daily Star*, 17 August 2004.
61. Salem, *Odd Man.*
62. See for example Franck Salameh's "Vous êtes Arabe puisque je vous le dis," in *Middle Eastern Review of International Affairs (MERIA),* vol. I, no. 1 (Spring 2006).
63. Salem, *Odd Man.*
64. Salem, *Odd Man.*
65. Michel Chiha, *Le Liban d'aujourd'hui (1942)* (Beyrouth, Lebanon: Editions du Trident, 1961), 49–52.
66. Ghali Shukri, *Salama Musa wa Azmat al-Damiir al-'Arabi* (Salama Musa and the Arab Conscience Crisis). (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khanaji, 1962), 32–33.
67. Taha Husayn, *The Future of Culture in Egypt* (Washington, D.C.: American Council of Learned Societies, 1954), 3–5.
68. Husayn, *The Future*, 86–87.
69. Husayn, *The Future*, 89.
70. Husayn, *The Future*, 89.
71. Husayn, *The Future*, 90.
72. Husayn, *The Future*, 90.
73. Received knowledge holds the Arabic alphabet to consist of twenty-eight symbols. That is incorrect. Arabic has indeed twenty-eight sounds represented alphabetically by twenty-eight basic shapes. But those twenty-eight basic skeletal shapes are amorphous and vary markedly in their morphology depending on whether they are connector or nonconnector letters, and whether they occur as "initial," "medial," "final," or "stand alone" letters. Add to that the diacritics, short vowels, and other spelling and inflectional markers, and the Arabic script easily reaches six hundred distinct shapes; not twenty-eight.
74. Husayn, *The Future*, 90.

75. Husayn, *The Future*, 89.

76. See for example Bassam Tibi's *Arab Nationalism: A Critical Inquiry*, Second Edition (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990), 186–88.

77. Nizar Qabbani, *Marginalia on the Notebook of Defeat* (June 1967), nizar.ealwan.com/poetry.php?id=103 (1 March 2009).

78. The "Subject and Predicate" is one of the basic sentence structures in Classical and Modern Standard Arabic syntax. Disengaging from this structure would be tantamount to doing away with the language altogether.

79. Qureish is one of the tribes of Arabia during the Prophet Muhammad's era, a Meccan tribe that Muhammad himself belonged to before he received the revelation of Islam. Kulayb, a diminutive of Kalb (Ar. Dog), is also a notable pre-Islamic Arabian tribe, famous for its poets.

80. Qabbani, *When Will Someone Finally Declare the Death of the Arabs, nizar.ealwan.com/poetry.php?id=110* (1 March 2009).

81. Qabbani, *I Reject You*, www.titanic-arwad.com/vb/showthread.php?t=16762 (5 May 2009).

82. Adonis, *Identité inachevée*, 22–23, 36.

83. Adonis, *Identité inachevée*, 22–23, 36.

84. Interview with Adonis on Dubai TV, March 11, 2006. memri.org/bin/articles.cgi?Page=archives&Area=sd&ID=SP112106 (5 Dec. 2006).

85. Interview with Adonis on Dubai TV, March 11, 2006.

86. Fouad Ajami, *The Arab Predicament* (Cambridge, Mass.: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 34–35.

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Swarming Memories, Clashing Identities: The Case for Lebanon

In Egypt I found a ruler!
In Lebanon I found a nation!

Lamartine, 1832

Much ink has been spilled over the past century in search of a Lebanese identity, and a great many debates have ensued among Lebanese and foreign specialists alike seeking an adequate definition of that identity.[1] Yet, "who are the Lebanese, and what is Lebanon?" remain elusive questions that continue to baffle and confuse. Indeed, if posed to two average Lebanese chosen randomly, chances are no concurring answers could be had about some sense of a shared understanding of Lebanon's identity. Is Lebanon Arab? Is it not? Is it Muslim? Is it Christian? Is it Phoenician, Western, Eastern, Syrian? Is it simply "Lebanese" *tout court*, or is it all of the preceding together and none at all?

Never mind that almost a century has elapsed since the formation of modern Lebanon, and never mind that two ravaging civil wars and a number of foreign occupations have brought the Lebanese state to the brink of dissolution. Lebanon and its people still defied a clear-cut, collectively accepted definition. Indeed, rather than becoming a synthesizer of disparate cultures and a harmonizer of opposing national visions, "a melting-pot" as some of its architects had intended it, modern Lebanon whittled the divisions and honed up the differences of its varied constitutive ethnoreligious communities. Some have even gone so far as to argue that the adjective "Lebanese" itself was ambiguous, a reference to

an amorphous people, and therefore meaningless unless hyphenated to other national attributes and identity parameters.[2]

The French-language Lebanese poet, Andrée Chédid, was deeply troubled by the heterogeneity of Lebanon and by the multiplicity of "faces" (and personas)[3] vying to tailor it into a shared monolithic label. In 1976, in the midst of Lebanon's delirious descent into war, Chédid attempted to decode her country's enigmatic identity in what became one of her most celebrated works of poetry, *Ceremonial de la Violence*. In this lyrical denunciation of the savageries of war Chédid lamented the intriguing multiple identities of her country with timeless anguished pleas:

What should you be called, Lebanon?/ What should you not be called?
Consumed by each of your faces,/ With which eye must you be gazed at?
With which ear must you be heard?/ and which of your personas must you use?[4]

This, half entreaty half outcry, became a kind of a collective national cri de coeur, at once deploring Lebanon's irresolute identity, but also dreading the dissolution of its diverse personality into a narrow definition that might ultimately etiolate its distinctness. Through her lyrical epistle Chédid was attempting to speak to both herself and her warring countrymen, by way of questioning a torn anthropomorphic Lebanon about its national essence. Her a priori assumption, however, was clearly that the answer was to be as manifold and as puzzling as the question itself. Therefore, as she seemed to suggest, the question should not have been "what are you" or "how should I address you, O Lebanon!" but rather "what is it that you are *not*" or "how should I *not* address you!" Because, in Chédid's view, Lebanon had already been consumed and rendered almost unidentifiable by its many faces, its many voices, and its many personas, and that perhaps in this very dissonance, hybridity, and multiplicity, dwelt Lebanon's uniqueness and true essence.

In 1913 the Lebanese-American thinker Khalil Gibran revealed the same ambivalence about his homeland and his own identity as expressed by his compatriot Andrée Chédid more than half a century later. That year, on the eve of the Great War, in a letter published in New York and addressed "To the Muslims" of Lebanon "from a Christian Poet," Gibran wrote:

> I am Lebanese and I'm proud of it,/ I'm not an Ottoman, and I'm also proud of it./ I have a beautiful homeland, of which I am, likewise, very proud./ And I have a nation with a past—[. . .] I shall remain an Easterner—Easterner in my conduct,/ Syrian in my desires, and Lebanese in my feelings—Regardless of how much I admire Western progress . . .[5]

Gibran, who had made a name for himself in the repertoire of modern Lebanese literature as a social and political insurgent against the mi-

sogyny, the sectarianism, the parochialism, and the social inequities of his native land, seemed in the excerpt above incapable of casting off the cloak of his own atavistic provincialism. The Middle East's primordial religious loyalties, against which he had written his most searing critiques in the early half of the twentieth century, seem to have been tightly woven into his perceptual fabric. Indeed, if the title of his letter were any indication, Gibran appeared to have clearly thrown in his lot with that of Lebanon's Christians, identifying himself first and foremost as "a Christian poet." Of course, this is an interpretation based on a twenty-first-century Western, secular, postreligious reading of identity, where religion is a mere appendage to one's selfhood, and not a very important one at that. In Gibran's Middle East of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, however, as is the case in the Middle East of today, religion was essential to national self-image and identity, the only identity that mattered, and Gibran's audience spoke only in those "national" terms. Still, Gibran was sensitive to secular identities, did use and understand nonreligious parameters of identity, and appeared to be employing the designation "Lebanese" tautologically with "Christian," and "Ottoman" interchangeably with "Muslim." In so doing, he appeared to be laying down the foundations of the hyperpatriotism—Lebanonism—that was to surge out of the Lebanon of the 1920s, and which, to this day, continues to be described as a "Christian" movement.[6] The conflation in the use of the terms "Lebanese" and "Syrian" notwithstanding, and although Lebanon as a distinct political entity was never mentioned explicitly in his letter, Gibran seemed unambiguous in spouting his admiration for the beauty and historical pedigree of his "homeland" (which he called "a nation with a past"), his pride in being "Lebanese" ("I'm Lebanese and I'm proud of it"), and his aversion toward the "Ottomans" ("I'm not an Ottoman, and I'm also proud of it"). Still, the ambivalence in the use of "Lebanese [. . .] feelings" and "Syrian [. . .] desires" revealed dubiousness and acquiescence in a congenital hybridity similar to the ones expressed by Andrée Chédid.[7]

In 1969, the Lebanese sociologist Sélim Abou expressed similar frustrations with that same "identity" dilemma. Ever since 1943, wrote Abou,

> date of [Lebanon's] independence, different vying groups have all claimed to belong to the same Lebanese identity. However, this common discourse was loaded with ambiguity, and indeed dissimulated very badly the private views that underlay the rhetoric. Each of these vying groups had aimed at advancing its own definition of the Lebanese identity, making sure that that definition referred, in one way or another, to the particular cultural loyalties which constituted that particular group's primordial identity. [. . .] The State, which had assigned itself the task of unifying all these various groups in 1943, believed it could succeed [in this unification attempt] by avoiding accurate definitions of the nature, the scope, and the limits of Lebanon's Arab

> and Western loyalties; all the while touting—by way of sloganeering—the concept of national unity. [. . .] Consequently, it is not surprising that "Lebanese identity" today inclines towards becoming empty words, the contents of which depend on the groups or communities using them.[8]

But this was not a dilemma grappled with by Lebanese alone, or through local cultural and literary narratives alone! Augustus Richard Norton, an American anthropologist intimately acquainted with Lebanon, was himself smitten by that country's peculiarity and, in the late 1980s, published a sociopolitical account redolent with the romantic imagery of Lebanon's literary narratives—again, holding a definitive interpretation of Lebanon's identity in abeyance. Norton referred to Lebanon as "a remarkably seductive place" and one of the most enthralling countries in the world.[9] Whether in its "social and political complexity, the keen skill of its [people] in dealing with (and manipulating) foreigners, [or in its] lovely climate and splendid food," Norton's Lebanon "imbue[d] those who have known it with a sense of emotional attachment that is hard to shake [. . .] Lebanon entices and ensnares even the wary," said he, and although its "encounter is often bittersweet, it is long savored."[10] Still, in Norton's view, an unhyphenated Lebanon, a Lebanon without its Maronite, Druze, Shi'ite, and Sunni demarcations, and one not depicted through the rainbow of poetic license, was to remain a vague and incomprehensible entity.[11]

Thus, and perhaps as consolation to perplexed natives and outsiders alike, Lebanon turns out to be a puzzle to both foreign observers and her own sons and daughters, poets to boot, experts who do not ordinarily shy away from sweeping generalizations, exaggerations, or oversimplifications. Even they, it seems, have given up on trying to fit Lebanon and its people into one coherent and comprehensive mold. As a result, Chédid's "*Comment te nommer Liban?/ Comment ne pas te nommer?*" remains a legitimate and compelling question. For, as a concept and a state, Lebanon still defied soothing reductionist labels. "What should you be called, Lebanon?/ What should you not be called?" that, indeed, remains the question!

LEBANONISM VS. PHOENICIANISM

Yet, there exists one aspect of Lebanese identity, a Lebanese national idea as it were, that sought to resolve this dubiousness. Outlined and promoted by the Lebanese poet Saïd Akl, and inaugurated as a coherent program in 1937, this conception of patriotism and Lebanese nationalism—locally referred to as "Lebanonism"—rejected the assumed Arabness of Lebanon

and proclaimed the Lebanese to be a sui generis endogenous and complete nation. Lebanonism was in many ways similar to a contemporaneous intellectual current, Phoenicianism, which viewed the modern Lebanese as descendents of the ancient Phoenicians, unrelated to the more recently arrived Arab conquerors of the seventh century. Yet, Lebanonism represented a transformation and a transition from its predecessor Phoenicianist current, even though it was never at great odds with it.

Phoenicianism was exemplified and spearheaded by francophone Lebanese intellectuals during the first three decades of the twentieth century. It saw the modern Lebanese descendents of the Phoenicians of yore as skillful cultural intermediaries and eloquent cosmopolitan polyglots who wielded multiple languages and were at home in several cultural settings, and who must, therefore, never be confused with their Arab neighbors and never be reduced to a single, monistic identity, defined by a single language and a single cultural ethos—Arabic or otherwise. Lebanonism espoused a similar conception of Lebanese identity, but unlike the Phoenicianist exponents of a non-Arab Lebanon, whose appeal remained constrained in a narrow Christian—indeed a Maronite—base, Lebanonism was concerned with a more inclusive demographic spectrum and considered the issue of a national language paramount in its preoccupations. This gave the ideas of Saïd Akl—Lebanonism's chief theoretician—considerable recognition in a Lebanese political culture still mired in primordial religious, sectarian, and parochial loyalties.[12] Indeed, through Lebanonism, and initially mainly through Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) as literary and political medium, Saïd Akl combined various elements of Phoenicianism, Mediterraneanism, and even Arabism, to advance a version of a Lebanese nationalism—and a Lebanese identity—transcending the Arabist narrative and Arabic history, culture, religion, and language. But Saïd Akl also sought to transcend the exclusivism of an essentially Christian Phoenicianism in order to appeal to, and heal, the Muslim component of Lebanese society whose political and cultural affinities were still intimately twined to various pan-Arabist and Islamist tendencies.[13]

Many of the principal intellectual and political actors in post–World War I Lebanon saw their nascent Lebanese "patriotism" expressed through the binary prism of "Arabism" (*'uruuba*) or "Localism" (*wataniyya*), expounded respectively through the linguistic medium of Arabic and French. Consequently, it became de rigueur for Lebanese patriots who saw Lebanon's cultural accretions to be corollaries of Arab-Muslim history to use MSA as their political and literary medium. Conversely, those Lebanese who saw their identity to be the outcome of a pre-Arab millenarian history—admittedly touched, but in their view unmodified by perfunctory and transitory Arab encounters—were largely, although not exclusively, francophone.

Breaking with his Phoenicianist cohorts (or as will be shown later, perhaps acting at their behest), Saïd Akl's Lebanonism would begin to explicitly make use of the Arabic language as a literary and political medium during the 1930s. But beginning in the mid-1950s, through his curious manipulation of metalinguistic terminology, Akl would proceed to employ the "Lebanese language"—as he called the Lebanese "dialect of Arabic"—as his logical foundation and expression of the Lebanese national identity.[14] However, his general claims, in perfect harmony with those of his Phoenicianist cohorts, would remain that, a) there exists a timeless Lebanese nation distinct and separate from the Arab nation; b) that this nation was born in the time of the ancient Phoenician seafarers (ca. 2300 BC) and has evolved since then to acquire its modern "Lebanese" parameters; c) that two main factors have molded the spirit of that timeless Lebanese nation: the consanguinity between Mount-Lebanon's constancy and the Mediterranean Sea's fluidity, and the unbroken link and filiation between the modern Lebanese and their Phoenician ancestors; and, d) that the "national language" of the Lebanese people is their humanistic cosmopolitan multilingualism—that is, the Lebanese are natural polyglots by definition, heredity, cultural accretions, and geographic necessity.[15]

Consequently, the Arabs, with whom a considerable component of Lebanese society still sought to identify, were depicted as no more than accidental and disordered fragments in a long cortège of conquerors who have paraded through Lebanon, but who have subsequently left it or became assimilated by it. Indeed, this ostensibly powerful assimilatory impulse of Lebanon's and its people—a theme introduced by the Belgian Jesuit educator Henri Lammens, who is considered by many a spiritual guide to the Lebanese nationalists of the 1920s—would become a national metaphor pervading the works of Phoenicianists and Lebanonists alike. In 1919, Lammens argued that "polyglotism and philological flexibility" were some of the most remarkable attributes of Lebanese cosmopolitanism.[16] He wrote that linguistic humanism, adaptability, and hybridity—perhaps allusions to Lebanon's apparent "lack of a national language" besides its "Arabic" dialectal variant—"cannot alter the integrity of one's nationality [. . .] just as the French people's adoption of a Latin dialect did not nullify the reality of their direct Celtic ancestry."[17] Alluding to the Arab-Muslim conquest of the seventh century, Lammens also suggested that the Lebanese culture's remarkable propensity to "assimilate and adopt" the cultures and languages of its conquerors, has over time rendered those very conquerors alien to their own previous cultures, and deaf and mute to their former "national" languages.[18]

Below is what a Lammens disciple and songster of Phoenicianism, the francophone Lebanese poet Charles Corm, said in 1933 about the dura-

bility of the Lebanese identity and the Lebanese nation, and their knack for absorbing and transforming even their most brutal and domineering of invaders, ultimately morphing those invaders into pacifist humanist Lebanese:

> Many were the nations,/ who charged our land,/ this tiny plot of land,/ which quelled them in the end!/ We've witnessed the passing,/ of peoples and of Ages,/ yet withstood and endured,/ in the radiant horizon,/ steadfast on our peaks,/ peaceful, sober, wise,/ since the dawn of Time!/ Many were the soldiers,/ many were the gods,/ Many were the magi, poets and princes;/ Many were the pompous kings and tyrants,/ who've filed at the foot/ of our rugged mountains!/ O Ramsis, Asarhaddon/ O Barkuk, Caracalla,/ transcending all your crimes,/ surmounting all your horrors,/ the canyon of Nahr-el-Kalb/ has kept but broken shards/ of your blood-spattered passage,/ on its quiet peaceful shores.[19]

And so, the invaders of Lebanon based on this narrative, were ultimately seduced and transmuted by it. They certainly added to the land's already textured human and cultural fabric, but in the end they all became Lebanese themselves. This approach drove Michel Chiha, in 1942, to argue that "the people of Lebanon [were] simply Lebanese"; neither Arabs nor Westerners, but rather a unique endogenous lot that can be best described as a "Lebanese type."[20] That was so, in Chiha's view, because a mere thirteen centuries of Arab-Muslim presence cannot dull Lebanon to the fact that its history spanned some fifty centuries prior to the coming of the Arabs.[21] With Saïd Akl, the theme of an immemorial (non-Arab) "Lebanese People" being "simply Lebanese" would come to constitute one of the foundational tenets of Lebanonism, and the phrase "Lebanon is Lebanese, free of labels and epithets extrinsic to its nature" would emerge as the movement's lapidary motto.

In the end, Saïd Akl's Lebanonist myth of origin seemed similar to, indeed complementary of, the one propagated by his Phoenicianist predecessors. However, in his view, and in order to fit Lebanon into the prevalent universal paradigm of what constituted a legitimate modern national state, language had to become a salient feature of identity. Consequently, and in addition to the obligatory polyglotism of his Phoenicianist predecessors, Akl attempted to normalize a specific sui generis Lebanese language as a badge of honor and testimony to Lebanese nationhood. In Akl's estimation, Language was the nimbus of the nation's cultural narrative and the vector of continuity between its past, its present, and its future.[22] More importantly, and in contrast to the Phoenicianists who touted a certain innate Lebanese multilingualism—a Phoenician legacy, and a specific feature of modern Lebanon's particularism as it were—Saïd Akl considered "national language" to be the most powerful psychosubjective national cement.[23]

Multilingualism was good, indeed desirable and to be actively nurtured and preserved in Lebanon, thought Akl, but nothing in his view defined the essence of the nation the way a coherent, indigenous national language could.[24] What's more, Akl wrote, none of the languages in Lebanon's vaunted linguistic repertoire could fulfill the role of a national language more fittingly than Lebanon's stigmatized native "dialect," codified and elevated to the position of a prestige speech form.[25]

Benedict Anderson wrote that "[. . .] the most important thing about language is its capacity for generating imagined communities, building in effect *particular solidarities*."[26] Saïd Akl understood, and came to embody that axiom. In fact, we shall see in the course of this study that the normalization of the conception of a "Lebanese vernacular" or "dialect" as a bona fide "Lebanese language," and its intellectualization as such in the media, literature, religious life, school curricula, and popular culture, would become a lifelong Aklian project. With Akl, this "vulgarization" and "intellectualization" would in turn become not so much a linguistic policy to be adopted and institutionalized by government, but rather an independent intellectual enterprise; a goad as it were, to push an already complicated Middle Eastern linguistic situation on the road to divorce from MSA.

Akl believed that only through the cognitive psychological separation of "Literary" and "Demotic" Arabic—that is the separation of MSA from what are commonly referred to as dialects—would the Lebanese people be emancipated from their imputed Arabness. In his judgment, a transformation of popular attitudes was a more effective factor of change than the institution of strict linguistic policies.[27] Therefore, acquainting the Lebanese people with the reality of their linguistic distinctness would take the form of "linguistic guidance" with Akl, not linguistic planning, governmental intrusion, or educational management—as had been the case throughout the twentieth century with countries like Turkey, Pakistan, and Norway, whose linguistic situations were very similar to the experiences of Lebanon and the rest of the Middle East.[28]

Anderson maintained that the "creolization" of the standard written Latin in Europe over the past millennium contributed to the formation of Romance languages, and consequently led to the development of a certain national consciousness cemented by national vernaculars. In other words, the dialects of Latin, which would ultimately become French, Spanish, Italian, and the rest, having over time gotten divorced from Latin linguistic dominance and the Latin Church, triggered a national awakening in what later became the French, Spanish, and Italian nations.[29] In this same vein, Maximilian Krepinsky has argued that "[. . .] Romance languages were born when the natives of the provinces [of the Roman Empire] attempted to speak the language of their conquerors."[30] This

process led to the "distortion" of Roman Latin, its fusion with the pre-existing indigenous languages of the newly conquered territories, and its ultimate transformation into what later became French, Spanish, Italian, Portuguese, and even English.

The linguistic situation in the modern Middle East is very similar to that of Medieval Latin Europe.[31] However, Semitist Joshua Blau remarked that Arab nationalists such as Sati' al-Husri have attempted to blur that reality in order to contrive a unity, tenuous as it might have been, between the vernacular languages of the Middle East and dominant MSA.[32] Consequently, Arab nationalism over the past century has in effect actuated a "decreolization" that sought to introduce an artificial "standard" literary language as a common spoken language for the presumptive Arab peoples. Through this process, the development of "vernaculars" into "national languages" got suppressed, and the elaboration of a new Arabic standard attempted to replace those "demotics." In the "Arab World," this anomaly is generally sanitized with such nomenclatures as *fus-ha* (eloquent)—in reference to MSA, Literary, or Classical Arabic—and *'amiyya* (vulgar)—in reference to vernacular languages. Thus, the marked distinctions between the Middle East's multiple speech forms are smoothed over and dismissed as mere variances in speech-codes; one formal (*fus-ha*), and the other(s) informal (*'amiyya*). Saïd Akl sought to reverse this situation in Lebanon; first through metalinguistic manipulation, by attempting to modify the terminology—replacing "diglossia" with plain "bilingualism"—and later by attempting to popularize the notion of a "genetic" difference between Arabic and the Lebanese vernacular.[33]

THE MARONITES AND ARABISM

> Bkerki [the Seat of the Maronite Patriarchate] established "Greater Lebanon"! Bkerki participated decisively in attaining Lebanese Independence in 1943! The true champions of [Lebanese] Independence were three: The Maronite Patriarch, [Sunni Prime Minister] Riad al-Solh, and the Lebanese people! Bkerki is the one that dominated and directed the [seventeenth-century Lebanese] Emir Fakhreddin's foreign policy, and it was Bkerki that facilitated the Emir's contacts with Europe leading to his defiance of the Ottoman state! It was also Bkerki who introduced the Arabic language into Mount-Lebanon where only Syriac had been spoken! Indeed, it was the Maronite clergy who played a decisive role in that domain! And it was the disciples of Bkerki who provided Lebanon, and the Arabs with their greatest thinkers, writers, and poets. Indeed, these men of letters produced a Lebanese literature that was purely Arabic in both its language and its content. [. . .] And lastly, our esteemed readers should be made to know that the humble writer of these

> sparse lines is Lebanese in his faith and Arab in his proclivities, and that those who hate the Arabs are in turn hated by him. In fact, the writer of these lines loves the grandeur of Islam, and considers its historical figures an example for mankind to emulate.[34]

Fouad Mashalany, the author excerpted above, is a respected Christian-Lebanese columnist for one of Lebanon's leading Arabic-language dailies, *An-Nahaar*. On the face of it, the topic of his article seems ordinary and anodyne, and the story he tells is one quite familiar to most Lebanese. Even a cursory look at Lebanon's official history textbooks would reveal that: a) the Maronites were instrumental in the formation and independence of modern Lebanon; b) the Maronites played a leading "national" and "international" role in the history of Ottoman Mount-Lebanon; c) it was in Lebanon, in 1610, and in the Maronite Monastery of St. Anthony Kozhayya, that the Middle East's first book ever was published—in *Karshuuni*, that is in a local Lebanese "dialect" written in Syriac characters; d) the first book to be printed in Arabic script, was also mass-produced in Lebanon, in another Maronite monastery, in the village of Khenshaara, around the year 1734. Indeed, it was Maronite bishop Germanos Farhat who had set up the Khenshaara monastery's printing press, and bishop Farhat was the Middle East's first author of Arabic-language children's books designed specifically for teaching Arabic in the early eighteenth century. Is it any wonder then, that the Maronites played such a prominent role in the nineteenth-century Arabic literary renaissance movement? After all, Lebanon's monasteries and seminary schools were home to some of the Middle East's major centers of learning—at least since 1584, date at which the Maronite College in Rome was established. So why does it sound as if Mashalany is consumed by guilt? Why does he feel the need to burnish and brandish his Arabist credentials—and boastfully volunteer those of his own community?

Perhaps the answer dwells in that, for the past century, the Maronites have been so intimately associated with the modern Lebanese Republic—a "breakaway" state in the eyes of Arab nationalists—which has become the proverbial thorn in the side of Arabism and an obstacle to Arab unity. This attitude has emerged possibly on account of the Maronites' alleged independent and distinct personality and their rejection of Arab nationalism and their ascribed Arab accretions. In his essay Mashalany appears to have been trying to atone for the harm done to the cause of Arabism by some members of his community; which explains his overwrought reminders of the Maronites bequests to the Arabic language and Arabic culture. But Saïd Akl and the Phoenicianists could have reminded Mashalany that gracing other people's languages and contributing to their grandeur was an innate Lebanese trait; that the honor that the Lebanese had done

Arabic, they had done other languages and other cultures; that no fawning was needed on Mashalany's part to atone for some Maronites' rejection of Arabism. It should be noted that even Khalil Gibran—who was only tangentially affiliated with the Lebanonist and Phoenicianist movement—responded in typical Phoenicianist fashion when asked about the secret behind his imposing mastery of the English language even though he was not a native Anglophone. The story is told that when informed he was considered "one of six men writing the most notable English" in the early 1900s, Gibran replied: "I who am but a guest to this language must needs treat it with deference. I may not take the liberties which its own sons may take."[35] In this same vein, Akl argued that the Lebanese humanist calling was to "deck the world's languages with Lebanese gems,"[36] and "grace the civilized world's 'Latin Languages' with Lebanese charms."[37] Charles Corm grappled with the same theme in *La montagne inspirée* and referred to the Lebanese deference and contributions to "the languages of others" (*les langues d'autrui*) as *"des baisers Libanais"* (Lebanese kisses); confirmation of Lebanon's linguistic humanism.[38]

Going back to Mashalany and Lebanon's Christians' relationship with Arabism, during the nineteenth-century American Protestant missionaries in Beirut, with the assistance of local Maronite intellectuals, undertook the translation of the Bible into Arabic. Of course, the Bible had previously been available to literate Levantine Christians, but only in those Christians' various demotic and liturgical languages—that is in Syriac, Greek, Latin, Aramaic, and Coptic—but not in Arabic. Learned medieval Levantine Christians, like their European counterparts, were expected to be proficient in two classical languages in addition to their own native vernaculars. This usually meant knowing both Greek and Latin. But if they already knew Greek and Latin, it was safe to assume that they were also proficient in their own Scriptures' original languages—that is, Aramaic and Hebrew. In addition to those four languages, they were also, naturally, fluent in their own vernacular languages, which ranged from a variety of Syriac and Aramaic dialects, to a number of Arabized local speech-forms. This multilingual crucible was considered the cultural norm among the literate Christians of the nineteenth-century Levant. And until the American Presbyterian mission to the Near East, an Arabic Bible had not been unavailable to local Christians, nor had there been a need for one. The American "Arabization" of the Bible constituted a "dislocation" of the Arabic language from its Islamic/Koranic context, and led to the popularization of its usage in Christian liturgical and ceremonial contexts. This dislocation provided an impetus to the Arabic literary renaissance movement—the Arabic *Nahda* of the late nineteenth century—which, in turn, weakened among some Middle Eastern Christian secularists the prevalent perception of Arabic as an exclusively Muslim language. Over time, this

"Arabization" of the Bible vivified the Classical Arabic language and eventually helped the emergence of a language-based, secular Arab nationalism. In due course, this novel "secular" nationalism, now being assisted by a "standard" Arabic language acting for the first time ever as the spiritual and scriptural language of Christians and Muslims alike, was able to inhibit the development of local "dialects" into "national languages" and helped forestall the elaboration of local vernacular-nationalisms.

It was precisely these Christian Lebanese roots of the Arabic literary *Nahda* that played a dominant role in Saïd Akl's instigation of a dynamic, language-based Lebanese nationalism. For, in spite of being a committed secularist, an advocate of an ostensibly heteroclite and inclusive Lebanese national movement, and an avid practitioner of the Arabic language—nay, an exalted contributor to its twentieth-century literary corpus—Saïd Akl seemed nevertheless troubled by the Arabization of the Bible and Middle Eastern Christian liturgy.[39] In a 1986 essay published in his weekly journal *Lebnaan*, Akl expressed his discontent with the "Arabization" of religion in Lebanon, tracing its history and comparing it to a theoretical reversal of the "vernacularization" of Europe's Latin and a repeal of the consequent Reformation and secularization of European Christianity. In this essay, Akl argued that God spoke to humans in a "Living Language," and that those humans, in turn, spread the message of God, also through the medium of a "Living Language."[40] Today, Akl continued, "those who are attempting to spread the word of God in a Dead language [that is to say, in Arabic,] are embarking on a vain mission; it is impossible to proselytize in a language that is no longer spoken; and a language that is no longer spoken can never be an effective apostolic language."[41] This was a clear denunciation of the Maronite Church's abdication in favor of Arabic, and a denunciation of Arabized Maronite sycophants like Fouad Mashalany.

But Akl's insurgency against the Arabic language began much earlier than 1986, and has continued in a more systematic fashion into the twenty-first century. His 1970 publication of *Mar Yuhanna l-Injiil* (The Gospel According to John)[42] and subsequently, in 1971, excerpts from Imam Ali's *Nahju l-Balaaghati* (The Peak of Eloquence)[43] into dialectal Lebanese—and in a modified Roman script that he refers to as the "Lebanese alphabet"—appear to have been a reaction to what Akl called the unnatural "spiritual and cultural Arabization" of Lebanon. It should be noted that Imam Ali's *The Peak of Eloquence* is considered both a pinnacle of classical Arabic literature and the most important collection of Shi'ite *hadith* (tradition), second only to Koran. The fact that this classic was translated into dialectal Lebanese alongside fragments of the Christian Gospels, and the fact that Akl's publishing house (World Vintage Books) commissioned these translations respectively to a Lebanese Shi'ite, Nagib Jamaleddine, and a Syrian Sunni, Kamal al-Charaabi, speak volumes to

Akl's endeavor at evincing his Lebanonist movement's heteroclite, nonsectarian character—and perhaps even laying in the groundwork for an eventual translation of Koran into dialectal Lebanese.[44]

In 1999, in yet another attempt at reversing the Arabization of Lebanon, Saïd Akl published *Missa Solemnis*, the Maronite Missal and Eucharistic Liturgy, again in dialectal Lebanese and in the Lebanese-Roman script. By 1999, the Maronite Church had begun to more actively encourage its parish priests to deliver homilies in MSA, replacing the age-long traditional sermons in vernacular. Thus, the reintroduction of liturgy in vernacular, and its codification in written form, appeared to be an attempt at repealing what Akl viewed as the "denaturalization" of the vernacular liturgy. However, as we shall note in the course of this study, Saïd Akl's national and linguistic de-Arabization program was more extensive and more sweeping than to be stereotyped as a "Christian Lebanese" movement, or one aimed at pulling the Maronites back to their "vernacular" Aramaic roots.

But before delving into the body of the inquiry into Saïd Akl's thought, a few other elements directly related to his nationalist commitments should be briefly outlined. These elements appear to have influenced Akl's thought and literary work very deeply. They include: a) the prevalent Lebanese belief in certain "geographical foundations" that contributed to the birth of the Lebanese nation; b) the role of myths and legends in constructing an ancient Lebanese-Phoenician filiation, articulating the idea of a millenarian Lebanese language, memory, and identity; c) the influence of Western works of literature and history dealing with Lebanon on the elaboration of the Lebanese national narrative; d) the Phoenicianist, Mediterraneanist, and Syrianist roots of Lebanonism; and finally e) the effects of the European habit of associating identity with language on the articulation of Lebanese language, memory, and identity.

LANGUAGE, GEOGRAPHY, AND NATIONALITY

Prior to Saïd Akl's Lebanonism, downplaying the role of one specific "national" language—especially as pertains to the Arabic language—in the elaboration of nationality and national identity, had become an article of faith among Lebanese nationalists of all stripes—Phoenicianists, Mediterraneanists, and Lebanonists. Not only that, but multilingualism, linguistic humanism, and adaptability, were professed as a Lebanese nationalist creed and a national trait that the modern Lebanese had allegedly inherited from their seafaring Phoenician forefathers. To their credit, whether or not those modern Lebanese were actual descendents of the Phoenicians, it is a fact that their region had for millennia been a Babel of

cultures and languages. As mentioned earlier, compared to other regions of the world, India and China for instance, multilingualism has been a distinctive staple of Near Eastern and Levantine life—one attested to in the Book of Genesis where God says "let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech." Whereas each of China and India had for millennia maintained uniform and unitary cultures that made use of a single language, always written in the same script, the Near East—Lebanese, Phoenician, or otherwise—had by contrast been distinguished by its chaotic cultural, linguistic, alphabetic, and ethnic stews.[45]

Thus, standing on solid historical ground, Michel Chiha maintained that "since time immemorial, but at least since the times of the Phoenicians, Lebanon could not have been anything if not a bilingual—even a trilingual—nation."[46] In 1953, he would hone that claim into a national mantra, arguing that, faithful to its Levantine origins and its multicultural and multireligious accretions, Lebanon cannot but remain forever invested in its congenital polyglotism.[47] Cosmopolitan multilingualism, in Chiha's view, was "Lebanon's major mode of being omnipresent throughout the universe" and the country's only way of remaining true to its fluid, Mediterranean essence.[48] He wrote that linguistic humanism and Lebanon's vital association with Mediterranean culture require familiarity, and indeed communion, with a number of Mediterranean languages that are, after all, part and parcel of Lebanon's own, specific cultural patrimony.[49] Chiha extolled the case of Switzerland, noting that none of the four official Swiss languages are indigenous to Switzerland; yet Switzerland's exquisite contributions to French, German, and Italian literature remain testimony to the "greatness and cultural agility" of the Swiss people.[50] This is the very essence of Lebanon and Lebanese-Mediterranean humanism, claimed Chiha. Indeed, Lebanon is the Middle East's "Switzerland" he argued; and as such, the Lebanese are well at ease living in France, Italy, Spain, Greece, England, Germany, or the United States, in perfect linguistic, intellectual, and spiritual harmony. Chiha marveled at how Arab nationalists can ask those cosmopolitan Lebanese to disengage from their linguistic and cultural multiplicity and isolate themselves "in the solitude of a troubled and spiteful nationalism."[51] His praise of Lebanon's multilingualism served a dual purpose in the elaboration of a non-Arab Lebanese identity. He exalted the ecumenical and universalist spirit with which a polyglot citizen of the world can endow humanity. But he also denounced the narrow, possessive, and coercive language-based nationalisms—Arab nationalism to be exact—with which Lebanon's neighborhood had to grapple; nationalisms which sought to coop up the human spirit into the strict perimeters of one conforming "national" language and one restrictive linguistic orthodoxy.

This indictment of reductive linguistic-nationalism was a familiar theme in the writings of another early twentieth-century Lebanese intellectual foe of Arab nationalism, Antun Saadé, the theoretician of Syrianism and Syrian identity who argued that a "Syrian nation," not an Arab one, prevailed in the Levant and the Fertile Crescent—that is, in present-day Syria, Lebanon, Israel, Jordan, and Cyprus. Like his Phoenicianist and Lebanonist contemporaries, Saadé believed in a strong geographical foundation to the identity of his Syrian people. He saw the driving force behind his brand of nationalism to be the cultural superiority of the Syrian nation; not so much superiority based on racial purity, but rather in function of the Syrians' cultural, ethnic, religious, and linguistic diversity.[52] This was one of the primary reasons Saadé refused to recognize a cultural kinship between the Syrians and the Arabs. He believed Arabism to be built on the basis of religious and linguistic community, two perimeters of identity that were anathema to his Syrianist creed, and ones conspicuously absent from his definitions of the nation.

Like his Phoenicianist contemporaries, Saadé regarded language merely as a mode of communication, not as one of the requisite criteria of peoplehood. In 1938 he wrote that:

> Whenever language is used as a basis of nationhood, the purpose is primarily the aggrandizement and expansion of the nation in question, as is presently the case in Germany. German thinkers have sometimes harked back to the unity of race and sometimes to the unity of language in order to justify their expansionistic aims and their desire to bring all the German-speaking peoples into one state.[53]

So, in this sense, Saadé was not only divorcing his definition of the nation from its potential linguistic parameters, rather, he was explicitly separating the Syrian people from the Arab people, and implicitly attacking pan-Arabism's totalitarian expansionist impulses. He claimed that even if the Syrians shared certain linguistic attributes with the Arabs, those were accidental not inherent cultural elements. Additionally, he believed that the Syrians' geographic location, historical experience, and cultural affinities could not possibly justify their imputed kinship to the Arabs and their arbitrary lumping into an Arab national framework. Unfortunately for Saadé—as well as for Chiha and other exponents of a "Lebanese polyglotism" opposed to Arabism—in a world order dominated by national-states, countries that are delineated and defined by sharp linguistic boundaries—often a single "national language"—could still marshal higher political and cultural legitimacy than states defined by nonlinguistic terms. Nevertheless, Lebanese nationalists like Chiha, Akl, and the rest, still opposed to Arab nationalism's "linguistic totalitarianism," still made use of European exceptions to bolster their own claims to distinction and

ward off Arabism's possessive impulses. Some of these examples—like those of the Swiss, Belgian, and Canadian Francophones, and the American, Scotsmen, and Australian Anglophones who are respectively neither Frenchmen nor Englishmen—have already been discussed earlier. But it bears repeating that Lebanese nationalists of all stripes latched most enthusiastically onto these examples and remained eminently unimpressed with Arabism's linguistic validation of the nation.

Mid-twentieth century Lebanese author and diplomat Nagib Déhdéh dedicated a lengthy chapter of his 1946 work, *Evolution de la nation Libanaise* (The Evolution of the Lebanese Nation,) to this very issue of language. He admitted that not unlike the majority of "nation-states, Lebanon does not have one specific [national] language possessing a cognate name corresponding to that of the state itself. [. . . Also] not unlike the Belgians or the Swiss, the Lebanese cannot be labeled by way of linguistically based national nomenclatures" and must not be pigeonholed as Arabs simply on account of a literary language they happen to share with their Arab neighbors—and a literary language that is, anyway, not a spoken idiom.[54]

Still, it is undeniable that language remains a powerful force in drawing the political boundaries of modern nations.[55] The Ottoman, Romanov, and Habsburg empires have disintegrated more precipitously, we are told, due to their linguistic incongruity and multiplicity.[56] Conversely, the unification of Germany is believed to have eventuated more rapidly because of linguistic affinities; and the various fitful schemes aimed at Arab unity—although to date, unsuccessful—have been lent more credibility precisely due to their linguistic bases. Many scholars, including Steven Barbour and Bernard Lewis, have remarked that a significant number of national and ethnic groups often "bear names that resemble strongly, or are virtually identical to the names of their languages."[57] This, in Barbour's view, constitutes the most discernible emblem of a person's national identity and an indelible audio-psychological recognition stamp. Conversely, Barbour admitted that "while linguistic differences can delimit ethnic groups, the boundaries of languages are [. . .] often determined ethnically."[58] In other words, it is the ethnic or national community's prerogative to determine whether its linguistic affinities with another community should be acknowledged or slighted, and therefore, whether mutually comprehensible verbal competencies should be labeled as separate bona fide "languages" or simply kindred "dialects" of the same language. Using a recent illustration, Barbour noted that:

> Croats and Serbs are [. . .] separated by religion, and see themselves as ethnically different; their dialects, having been considered [. . .] to be a single language [Serbo-Croatian] for around a century, were redefined in the 1990s as

> two languages [respectively "Croatian" and "Serbian"], separated on ethnic lines. [. . .] The boundary of a language often becomes particularly clear if an ethnic group comes to see itself as a nation. A nation may make a collective, conscious effort to raise its dialect, or group of dialects to the status of a language, and may take deliberate, conscious steps to differentiate it from related varieties, as happened very clearly in the case of Norwegian in the nineteenth century [declaring the Norwegian language to be separate from Danish and Swedish].[59]

It is for related reasons, Barbour claimed, that one can find speech forms that are described as dialects of the same language but that are mutually incomprehensible.[60] He noted that:

> There is, for example, low comprehensibility between many German dialects. The reverse case is more common; there is, for example, usually a high level of mutual comprehensibility between spoken Norwegian and spoken Swedish, and between written Norwegian (Bokmal) and written Danish, despite the fact that all three are considered separate languages. There can also be a high level of mutual comprehensibility between neighboring Slavonic languages—for example, between Czech, Slovak, Polish, Ukrainian, Belorussian, and Russian, and between Slovene, Serbian, Croatian, Macedonian, and Bulgarian.[61]

Yet those languages with very high levels of mutual comprehensibility remain languages in their own rights, not dialects of the same language. Conversely, national (and nationalist) expediency dictate that mutually incomprehensible dialects of German, for instance, or in our case the dozens of "dialects of Arabic," be viewed as a single unitary language.

Early in his career, Saïd Akl became aware of this very important role of language—and more significantly, the importance of metalinguistic manipulation—in the molding and preservation of national identity. He believed that various Middle Eastern languages have been inaccurately described and falsely classified as dialects of Arabic, and that politically charged narratives painting the Middle East, or "the Arab World," in terms coterminous with a single (Arabic) language, were deceptive and simplistic characterizations serving one dominant nationalist aim, not tangible cultural and linguistic realities. Consequently, a leading element in Saïd Akl's political Lebanonism became: a) the initiation of a Lebanese "national language"; b) the codification and intellectualization of that national language; and c) the modification of the Lebanese people's approach to their spoken tongue and the correction of the nomenclature traditionally used in reference to language, dialect, colloquial, and demotic. In short, Saïd Akl sought to render the spoken Lebanese demotic into one more distinguishing feature of identity—in addition to the traditional "geographical" and "historical" arguments put forth by his

Phoenicianist elders—setting the Lebanese people apart from their Arab neighbors.

GEOGRAPHIC IDENTITY AND MEMORY

> Located on the Western edge of the Syro-Mesopotamian quadrangle, Lebanon has the task of transmitting to the Western world the faintest pulsations of the Eastern and Arab worlds. And given its position on the shores of the Mediterranean, Lebanon also has the task of intercepting—before anyone else—the life ripples of the Mediterranean, of Europe, and of the universe, in order to cast them and retransmit them [. . .] to the nations of the hinterland, to this realm of sands and mosques and sun. Such is an element of an "Eternal Truth."[62]

This standard portrayal of Lebanon as a "mission" dictated by its unique geographic location came not from some zealous traditional Lebanese nationalist who would be expected to offer such kind and devout testimonials to his country's cosmopolitanism, diversity, and geographic uniqueness. These were the words of Kamal Jumblat; a Lebanese Druze chieftain, a one-time Left-Wing parliamentarian and a committed Arab nationalist who spent a good part of his adult life attempting to debunk the very image of Lebanon as elaborated by traditional Lebanese foes of Arab nationalism—that is, the image of Lebanon "the crossroads," "the hybrid intermediary," and "the Middle East's bridge to the West." Nevertheless, in the passage above, Jumblat seemed convinced of the logic of Lebanon's "geographic" determinism, even though Arabism and Arab unity might have become overriding themes in the pantheon of his political beliefs during the 1950s and 1960s. In fact, Jumblat actually outdid himself in a 1946 address delivered at the Cénacle Libanais forum. This inaugural talk at the newly founded Beirut think tank was essentially an outline of Jumblat's political platform as a Deputy seeking reelection for the Shuf district of Mount-Lebanon. As the reader will note, the content, style, and imagery used in Jumblat's political speech betrayed a committed Phoenicianist, not the socialist Arabist whose support for the Palestinians and other Arab nationalist causes during the second half of the twentieth century, would become a catalyst in the disintegration of the Lebanon that he had previously glorified. Said Jumblat in 1946:

> This beautiful golden coast, which has witnessed thousands of years ago, the birth of the first City-State, the birth and the propagation of the first national idea, the establishment of the first maritime empire, and the emergence of the first representative democratic system in the context of

> a parliamentarian monarchy under a bi-cameral chamber of Deputies and Suffetes—and all this, at a time when early humanity was still stumbling through its very first steps, long before the radiance of Athens and long before the ascendancy of Roman Law. Very near to this sea, which had been Lebanese since the beginnings of time, and which radiated in the grandeur and reason of Sidon, Byblos, Tyre, Carthage, Alexandria, Athens, Rome, Constantinople, Beirut, and Cordoba [. . .] here on this very unique spot in the world, where the Mountain and the Sea meet, frolic, and embrace [. . .] in a national consciousness that gave birth to the first independence movements in the East. [. . .] This national consciousness was incarnated in this homeland of humanism, receptive and open to all of the world's intellectual currents. [. . .] In this country, at once old and young, the Alpha and the Omega, this country, to which the world owes values, ideas, Men, institutions, and splendor, [in this country] we are justified in being optimistic and proud of who we are.[63]

These are predominant symbols and self-images of the Lebanonist and Phoenicianist canon. To most Lebanese nationalists of all stripes, geography and the conjugation of Mount Lebanon with the Mediterranean Sea were important constitutive elements of the Lebanese nation. Both Mountain and Sea are viewed as Lebanon's communal hearth where the spirit of the nation is molded, fired, and firmed up, and where sentiments of kinship among members of the nation are kindled and nurtured. Geography was also a solid physical bond between Lebanon's past, present, and future; an everlasting stage and witness to the country's history and achievements. For a future Arab nationalist like Jumblat to use such imagery and symbolism is testament to the sway that Lebanon's Phoenicianist narrative must have held over the young parliamentarian. But again, how could he evade Lebanon's geography?

Applying Anthony Smith's example of the Swiss people and the Swiss Alps as "sacred territories," one can easily draw parallels to the Lebanese nationalists' notions of rugged Mountains and fluid Mediterranean. Smith wrote that:

> success in battle on the mountain slopes and passes engendered in the Swiss peasants and herdsmen a simple faith in divine providence, exemplified by the ability of faithful and virtuous shepherds to triumph over far more powerful enemies. In this way, an association between a pure and virtuous people and an unspoilt and unmolested land became a cornerstone of later Swiss national consciousness; and it continues to influence contemporary Swiss self-images and attitudes to the outside world.[64]

Dovetailing Smith's commentary, Michel Chiha has shown that, like the Alps to the Swiss, Lebanon's "sacred mountains"—Mount Lebanon and

its Mediterranean shores—possessed a remarkable mythical and mystical value. He claimed that:

> Phoenicia is, first and foremost, the sea. Mount-Lebanon, however, is by definition a mountain. It is this inter-penetration of the mountain and the sea that has molded our [Lebanese] republic.[65] [. . .] If the Lebanese seek to eke out a living wherever possible, it is primarily for the sake of protecting certain beliefs. The [Lebanese] Mountain is a spiritual sanctuary. All of the religious minorities who live there [. . .] have found in these high mountains a refuge from oppression, and a haven for freedom. [. . .] The mystique of Lebanon is in the fact that its Mountain was gradually populated by restless people, by hunted people. These people had abandoned their possessions behind them, in order to safeguard their lives and their souls.[66] [. . .] We are a breed of mountaineer-navigators, markedly different from those [people] who surround us.[67] [. . .] There are certain spiritual and physical bonds that bind a man and his country together, indeed a man and his district. Just as one gets attached to one's own house, or the house of one's grand-parents—though it does not belong to him—man does also get attached to a nook of land, to a landscape, to a city, to a neighborhood, and to their boundaries. Little by little, this [attachment] can extend to the dimensions of the entire homeland. It is quite moving that one should deem one's own country the most inspiring and the most charming of all. This is all the more legitimate when the country in question is a physically small one [like Lebanon].[68]

Indeed, Chiha has argued that to love a large country, one with the expansive dimensions of a continent—read the "Arab world"—and one with which its nationals could not possibly become intimately acquainted, would be a bit pretentious and insincere.[69] In his view, affection for homeland is born out of love derived from physical and visual nearness to it; not arrogance and pride, or imperious autarchy and yearning for an abstract concept such as that of an Arab world.[70] In fact, without a "geographic basis," or a concrete geographic bond, there could never be genuine emotional references on which members of the nation could fall back. Therefore, as Chiha suggested, Arabism, which sought to absorb a Lebanon with which it had no physical affinities, could never grow into a genuine national feeling, only an egotistic domineering irredentism, and an irrational possessive fling.

French historian Jules Michelet wrote that:

> Without a geographical basis, a people, the actors of History, seem as if walking in the air, like in Chinese paintings where the ground is often missing. And note that this ground, this native soil, is not only a stage. Through food, climate, etc., the soil inspires in a hundred ways. Like the nest is to the bird, so is the fatherland, the soil, to man.[71]

Michelet's precept that soil, geography, and climate constituted the physical anchors of the nation, would become an important argument, brandished and recited fervently—and often—by a good number of Lebanese nationalists, from Charles Corm, to Michel Chiha, to Saïd Akl. In fact, Henri Lammens was perhaps the first modern "Lebanese nationalist" to have elaborated such strong geographical sentiments, and to have intellectualized a topographic framework for the Lebanese nationalism that was later developed and refined by his Phoenicianist and Lebanonist disciples. However, rather than having been a constant, lifelong Lebanese nationalist, Lammens was initially a Syrianist, a committed advocate of the idea of an authentic "Syrian" Syria, physically, culturally, and ethnically separate from the Arab world, and geographically inclusive of Lebanon. Indeed, the Lebanon which inspired Lebanese nationalists (namely Phoenicianists) prior to 1919, was a "Syrian" Lebanon, and those Lebanese nationalists who laid down the foundations of a Lebanese Phoenicianism after 1919 were devoted disciples—actual students—of Henri Lammens and fervent exponents of his ideas. After all, the oft-repeated Lebanese adage that Lebanon was a "challenge to the geography of its neighborhood," had been a Lammens coinage used initially to extricate Syria from an emergent Arab nationalism.[72]

In 1929, Henri Lammens, taking the path beaten by his young Phoenicianist disciples ten years earlier, would realign his "Syrianist" scholarship in the service of Lebanon and an emerging Lebanese national state.[73] Syria would then become a Lebanese appendage, a geographic extension of the Lebanese Mountain and a Lebanese eastern province. In bolstering this argument, Lammens would rely largely on philological and etymological evidence, demonstrating the name "Syria" to have been chronologically posterior (by about twenty centuries) to the name "Lebanon"—and the appellation "Lebanon" itself to have been indigenous and that of "Syria" a foreign loan-word of Greek origins.[74] Lammens claimed that the Syria of his times, 1929 Syria, "pronounced 'Suurya' in a contrived Arabic phonology, was a spurious imitation of the Greek word 'Surya,' itself an abbreviation of 'Assuria,' and a substantive noun in reference to the 'land of the speakers of Syrian.'"[75] Therefore, by lacking etymological authenticity, modern Syria in Lammens's" estimation came to lack political legitimacy—or at least was want of the historical depth required for political legitimacy. For the remainder, Lammens argued that the appellation "Syria" did not benefit from the same historical pedigree as "Lebanon"; that although the land of Syria itself was alluded to in the Torah, it was "part and parcel of the area of Aram, whereas the Scriptures gave Lebanon an autonomous status all its own."[76] Even Homer did not appear to have been aware of the appellation "Syria," argued Lammens, his

poetry extolling Phoenicians [not Syrians]."[77] Lammens further claimed that the first writer of antiquity to have mentioned "Syria" by name was the fifth-century BC poet Achilles. However, he noted that Achilles' "Syria" referred to the Kingdom of Assyria (in present-day Iraq), and not to any well-delineated Syrian entity as it is perceived today.[78] Only after the conquests of Alexander the Great, Lammens continued, did the abbreviated form of "Assyria" begin dominating literature and was eventually adopted by Latin writers as "Syria." Still, maintained Lammens, the geographical significance and political personality of "Syria" remained dubious until the Roman conquest of the Eastern Mediterranean in 63 BC.[79] By then, the name "Syria" had begun referring to an "administrative district between the Mediterranean and the Taurus."[80] Thus, concluded Lammens, "the appellation 'Syria' was younger than the appellation 'Lebanon' by about 2,000 years at the very least," and therefore there existed a Lebanese national substance with more historical depth, geographic coherence, and etymological authenticity than the contrived Syrian one.[81] This came to define the basic parameters of some of the arguments used by modern Lebanese nationalists to distinguish themselves from "Arab" Syria, and to resolve the nineteenth-century conflation in the terminology in reference to "Syria" and "Lebanon."

French historian Fernand Braudel argued that a nation's geographical references and the role that geography plays in the formation of a nation receive less attention than they should from traditional historians who prefer to steer clear of the ambiguities of geographical determinism.[82] We saw that these sorts of misgivings were not a luxury that Lebanon's nationalists were prepared to abide. We shall see in the following sections that Lebanese nationalists were able to rely on the testimony of several Western travelers, historians, poets, and geographers, to bolster their claims to the non-Arab physiognomy and character of Lebanon.

In a paper presented at the Cénacle Libanais in 1957, British historian Arnold Toynbee argued that Lebanon in its current personality was the "choice, the decision, and the expression of *nature*."[83] He maintained that the history of Lebanon and the customs, mannerisms, and other properties of Lebanon's peoples were the result of the country's physical features.[84] To Lebanese nationalists, this perspective affirmed Lebanon's purported Arabness to be culturally and historically fatuous; Toynbee's validation made Arabness physically impracticable as well.

Like Toynbee, Saïd Akl also believed Lebanon to have been the result of geographic determinism.[85] Mediterranean sea, mountains, snows, forests, abundance of water, climatic and topographic diversity, fertility of soil, etc., these physical attributes of Lebanon's were exceptional, indeed anomalous, when compared to the dull landscape, the barren soil, and the oppressive climate of its neighborhood, often reflected Akl.[86] What

makes Lebanon special, he argued, was its mountain;[87] not only in the concrete visual-physical sense, but also in terms of the climatic variety that a mountain provides; a variety that sustains a physical milieu and a habitat favorable to human creativity, inventiveness, and enterprise.[88] In this sense, Lebanon and its people, have very little in common with the lands and the peoples of their neighborhood. "How can anyone look at [Lebanon]," mused Henri Lammens, "and confound it with any of its [Arab] neighbors?"[89] Its mountains, snows, and climate are striking contrasts experienced by any traveler flying over Lebanon from the East. The differences are stunning; vines, olives, chestnuts, mulberries, figs, cedars, wheat, terraced orchards, and fragrant groves. And so, to Akl, it is unconscionable that anyone could still argue that the Lebanese and the Arabs share cultural affinities, if only judging from the physiological features of their landscapes. "There are no camels in Lebanon" was a phrase popularized by Lammens and latched upon by generations of Lebanese nationalists who followed in his footsteps.[90]

In sum, Lebanon was "invented by Geography," as opposed to national dogmatism, to use Braudel's expression.[91] That is not to say that the Lebanese identity was not a unique outcome of history and necessity as well. Saïd Akl and the rest certainly recognized the role of human history in shaping Lebanese identity. In fact, like Chiha before him, Akl fervently believed that the modern Lebanese were indeed successors, heirs, upholders and perpetuators of the works, exploits, and achievements of their remote ancestors, the aggregate of their remote ancestors! To Akl as to Chiha, this was a foregone conclusion and a weighty historical responsibility to be shouldered and displayed with pride. Still, both Akl and Chiha ascribed an active, indeed a vital importance to the role played by geography in molding the essence and the soul of their compatriots.[92] "The Lebanese are a nation of mountaineers, farmers, pioneers, and navigators, very different from the surrounding nations" argued Chiha.[93] "Their mountain had always been a refuge against oppression, and a harbor of freedom. And when the mountain could no longer sustain them, they often headed for the Mediterranean. And so, the essence of Lebanon comes from the fact that, since the dawn of time, it was inhabited by a restive people, and by molested and hunted down minorities . . . ,"[94] who, in the words of the French poet Jean-Louis Vaudoyer:

> [. . .] commanded and dominated all the known and unknown oceans . . . established their fabulous trading posts along the world's finest shores. . . . They came, they left, they came back again; but they never colonized, they never brutalized, and they never subjugated . . . they simply conquered by way of cultural seduction. They were sailors, teachers, traders, prophets, and poets. . . . They were pacifist, versatile, adaptable, and elegant. . . . They were

> Sidonian Phoenicians. The fountainhead of their fortune had always been beyond the seas, always at the other edge of the world.[95]

This is simply a poetic variation on Arnold Toynbee's inference that the human history of Lebanon constitutes a distinct geographically actuated sociocultural unity and a continuity that dates back to the times of the Phoenicians, perhaps even earlier. Vaudoyer's poem simply added another element to the millenarian Lebanese Sailor-Mountaineer legend; it added that of the Adventurer-Immigrant, whose "fortune always [was, and continues to be] at the other edge of the world."[96] This was so, precisely due to Lebanon's pronounced geographic particularism. To be sure, culture, human history, and linguistic humanism certainly mattered, but they were ultimately all molded by geography.

LEBANESE WITH AN ARAB FACE?

To a first time visitor coming up for landing at Beirut International Airport, and to those Lebanese returning home after a long absence, Lebanon's idiosyncrasies begin to come into focus the minute its topographical features begin surging out of the Mediterranean and the Syrian Desert.[97] Only then would one begin to realize that Lebanon's mystifying human differences are indeed chiseled into its very landscape, and that the specificity of its people might in fact be the result of its own physical diversity and, indeed, its very geographical deviation from its neighborhood's norm. Impavid mountains delaying deserts creeping up from the East; abrupt promontories wading into the Sea, washing the foot of the Lebanon over cascading Mediterranean shores; steep gorges bracing an arresting row of snow-capped peaks; buried ravines hiding secret terraced meadows; perched villages strewn off the edge of a void, mingling with stars scattered overhead! This is Lebanon viewed from above and from within; a veritable "challenge to the geography" of its neighborhood.[98]

To these topographical, and their corollary cultural divergences, one could add one more psychological or cognitive element to complete the gamut and further contribute to the confusion that physical and political Lebanon inspired. Indeed, as we saw earlier, Lebanon is manifold even in its own perception of itself, making it at once ambiguous and amorphous as a political, cultural, and psychological entity. Ambiguous, perhaps because it was meant to be perceived the way each of its national components chose, or were predisposed, to perceive it. Consequently, to some, Lebanon was a colonial throwback, an interim entity illegitimately amputated from an integral Arab state and awaiting an eventual reunification. To others it was simply the western province of a *Syria Irredenta*, which

as the prevalent Arab nationalist claim went, through Western colonial machinations got somehow "carved out" of "natural Syria" and is currently awaiting reassimilation into the "motherland." To others, Lebanon was modern Phoenicia incarnate, Europe's doorway to the East and the Arab world's bridge to the West; a sublime exercise in humanism and multiethnic coexistence and amalgamation; a hospitable meeting place and crosscurrent of cultures, languages, religions, and political tendencies. To others yet, Lebanon was simply Lebanon; neither Phoenician, nor Syrian or Arab, nor even a hybrid of the three. Put simply, to the advocates of this last current, the Lebanonists, Lebanon was a sui generis endogenous Lebanese entity and a modern extension of an ancient, timeless, Lebanese civilization that was never part of anything or anyone beside itself. In fact, Saïd Akl, the chief theoretician of this last Lebanese nationalist tendency, used a Christian metaphor to dissent from the prevalent view of his Phoenicianist predecessors and mentors, and to argue that Lebanon and Phoenicia were two of three names—three incarnations as it were—in reference to a single Lebanese substance.[99] Thus, in a collection of poetry published in French in 1999, Akl exhorted an anthropomorphic Lebanon, a "fairytale in three shades of light" and the nimbus of his trinity of light, to narrate itself and reveal the three components of its single hallowed essence:

> Lebanon, fairytale in three shades of light/ Dare narrate yourself . . . / Do declare your name: "Lebanon," "Phoenicia," and "let there be eternal light."[100]

Thus, Akl would transform the Phoenicianist narrative, which argued that the modern Lebanese were descendents of the ancient Phoenicians, into manifest evidence that the Phoenicians themselves were simply one incarnation in a trinity representing the same self-generated Lebanese substance.

In the end, the protagonists of "being Lebanese," in their Arabizing, Phoenicianizing, or Lebanonizing tendencies, have sought an interpretation of their country that would be admissible to all those who called themselves "Lebanese," inclusive of all the human and cultural elements that constituted the modern Republic of Lebanon. Unfortunately, all these attempts remained elusive in the eyes of outsiders, and exclusivist in the eyes of various Lebanese protagonists. In short, all enterprises have, to date, only succeeded in trying to dissolve the cultural personality (or perception) of the "other" into that of the "self," instead of inaugurating a brave new *Homo Libanicus*, whose cultural and historical references would have relevance to all the constituents of the Lebanese nation. Consequently, the idea of a timeless multicultural, multiethnic, multireligious "Phoenician" Lebanon, cultivated symbols, similes, and metaphors that

appealed largely to the Christian component of the Lebanese republic. In the end, this non-Arab Lebanon was utterly rejected by the majority of Lebanon's Muslims and remained an almost exclusively Christian vision. Similarly, the idea of an "Arab" Lebanon, emotionally, politically, and culturally linked to its Arab-Muslim environment, was utterly rejected by the majority of Lebanon's Christians, and thus remained largely—although not exclusively—the province of Lebanese Islam. And so the quibbling between Lebanese "Arabists" and Lebanese "Lebanonists" continues.

In the meantime the protagonists of both sides have over a ninety-year period dug in their heels and become more intransigent in their own restricted visions of their country's identity. Both sides have also had ample time to construct and adduce more eloquent and more cogent arguments in support of their own exclusive self-image. Consequently, many Lebanese today maintain with much enthusiasm and fervor, and can argue with much poise, that Lebanon is by definition an "Arab" entity. Many others can affirm with equal verve and conviction, and based on their own legitimate historical narrative, that by definition Lebanon's very substance and mission are bound up and outlined by Lebanon's diversity, openness, and multiplicity—and consequently by an authentic Lebanese particularism, not by any putative or imagined Arabness.

This binary division—between "Arabizers" and "Lebanonizers"—has instigated so much animosity and controversy over the past eighty years of modern Lebanon's political life, that even the Lebanese Constitution was compelled to evade the question of identity altogether, and allude to it only through the art of statecraft and semantic diversion.[101] In fact, save for Article 11, which merely proclaimed Arabic to be "the official language of administration [alongside] French,"[102] there was no specific mention of Lebanon's Arabness in any Lebanese legal document prior to the 1989 (Ta'if) Constitutional Amendment—the ratification of which was coerced through, then, the Syrian domination of Lebanon. Otherwise, the 1943 Lebanese National Pact, which in Lebanese political parlance was a binding Levantine-flavored "gentlemen's agreement"—not a codified constitutional principle—provided a crafty formula claiming Lebanon to be a singular nation in its neighborhood, diverse, pluralist, unique, and different to be sure, but a nation with an enigmatic "Arab Face."

This clever compromise appeared to have temporarily assuaged the fears and apprehensions of both the exponents of Arab and non-Arab Lebanon alike. But in reality, its very evasiveness stoked up the fires of discord between the two major protagonists of Lebanon's identity, and staved off their impending collision—carting it over to a later era and a different setting. But with the benefit of hindsight and with attentiveness to each of the two groups' understanding of the "Arab Face" formula, one

might have been able to foretell the devastating storm that was brewing in Lebanon's political horizon.

Still, the "Arab Face" palliative of the National Pact might have translated into a quarter century of relative peace and economic prosperity for Lebanon. It was nevertheless an ephemeral and provisional patch up job. To the Arabist component of the nascent Lebanese state, the "Arab Face" was a clear recognition of the incontestable Arabness of their country. To the Lebanonist camp, it meant nothing more than a vacuous slogan and a flimsy outer cloak to the evident non-Arab personality of the state. In other words, the mere mention of a "notional" Arabness in an unwritten document was an implicit invalidation of this putative "Arabness" for some, while it was a clear confirmation of it for others.[103] And so, exponents on one side of the fence clamored that Lebanon's "face" might have been "Arab," but that its more fundamental soul and conscience were something else entirely; while exponents of Arabness, on the other side of the fence, maintained that Lebanon's Arab "complexion" mattered more than its invisible—or imagined—Lebanese "entrails."

But how is it that a people's identity gets to be conceived and determined through a constitutional document or a "gentlemen's agreement" such as the Lebanese National Pact? Is identity the outcome of self-will? History? Geography? Language? Memory? Or is it a decision to be made by politicians and hustlers in the bazaars of a Levantine "Merchant Republic?" Whatever the answers, both Lebanese Arabists and Lebanonists seemed to agree that their particular history, geography, genealogy, and language were indeed what made them who they are. But who are the Lebanese? Or perhaps more importantly for our purposes, who do they think they are, and how does Saïd Akl, "the architect of the spirit of the nation" perceive them? These are some of the questions that the following chapters will attempt to broach and answer in earnest.

NOTES

1. Arnold Toynbee, "Le Liban, Expression de l'Histoire," *Conférences du Cénacle*, XIe année (Beirut, Lebanon: Editions du Cénacle Libanais, 1957), 6–7. See also *Les années "cénacle"* (Beirut, Lebanon: Dar an-Nahar, 1997), 43–44.

2. Augustus Richard Norton, *Amal and the Shi'a: Struggle for the Soul of Lebanon* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1988), 127.

3. *Persona* is used here, as I believe Andrée Chédid intended it in her poem, in its Latin sense, to mean "through which the sound comes out."

4. Andrée Chédid, *Ceremonial de la violence* (Paris: Flammarion, 1976), 52.

5. Khalil Gibran, *Al-Majmuu'a al-Kaamila li Mu'allafaat Jebran Khalil Jebran* [Khalil Gibran's Complete Works], vol. 4 (Beirut, Lebanon: Al-Jil, 1994), 208.

6. Although, as we shall see, Phoenicianism became most articulate and more assertive (as a component of the Lebanese identity) with Charles Corm, Gibran was the first Lebanese to have diffused a Phoenician narrative in Arabic and English. References to pagan (Phoenician) gods, temples, and beliefs woven into the landscape of Mount Lebanon and the Mediterranean populated Gibran's literary narratives. Furthermore, references to a compassionate monotheism and to a (Lebanese) Jesus—or at least to a Jesus who made frequent visits to Lebanon, and in some instances sat at the doorsteps of Phoenician temples—and the link between compassionate Phoenician pantheism and modern Lebanese Christianity, were a key feature of Gibran's writings, many decades before Saïd Akl began articulating similar ideas. See for instance Gibran's *Al-Mawakib* [The Processions] in *Khalil Gibran's Complete Works*. Lyrical passages from this work have been immortalized and popularized by the Lebanese singer Fayrouz. They normalize the vector of continuity between the ancient Lebanese (presumably the Phoenicians) and the modern inhabitant of the Republic of Lebanon. See also Gibran's *Broken Wings* (New York: Citadel Press, 1957), where in a chapter entitled "Between Christ and Ishtar," the novel's Heroine (Selma Karami) is compared to the Phoenician godess Ashtarut (Ishtar), contributing to the creation of a Phoenician dimension to modern Lebanon. See also Gibran's *Jesus the Son of Man* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1928), and *Nymphs of the Valley* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1948).

7. More will be said later about the conflation in the use of the terms "Lebanon" and "Syria." Suffice it to say at this point that the term "Syria" in the writings of Gibran and other late nineteenth, early twentieth-century "Lebanese" authors, referred strictly to a geographical notion bereft of any political or ethnic connotations, and certainly distinct from today's Syrian Arab Republic. Albert Hourani has argued that the term "Syria" was common usage among the educated classes in Lebanon toward the end of the nineteenth century, and was intended as a form of "Lebanese" patriotism, distinct from Ottomanism or Arabism (see for instance Hourani's *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age, 1798–1939* [United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 1997, pp. 317–18]). Indeed, a careful vetting of the literature of the time will show that "Arabs" and "Arabists" referred to "geographical" Syria as "Al-Shaam," and that only the "Lebanese," and mainly Christians with a "Syro-Lebanese"—and not an "Arab"—national consciousness used the term "Syria," and then interchangeably with "Lebanon" and in reference to a Lebanese territorial patriotism.

8. Sélim Abou, "Les Conditions d'une culture nationale à partir du bilinguisme," *Les états multilingues: problèmes et solutions* (Québec: Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 1975), 478–79.

9. Norton, *Amal and the Shi'a*, xiv.

10. Norton, *Amal and the Shi'a*, xiv.

11. Norton, *Amal and the Shi'a*, 127.

12. See the entries on Saïd Akl in *Who Is Who in Lebanon* (Beirut, Lebanon: Les Editions Publitec, 1963–1993).

13. Saïd Akl, "Bi-Kalimaat" [In a Few Words] in *As-Safir* (Beirut: July 10, 2000). In this article, Saïd Akl commends the courage of the *Al-Maqaased* Sunni *Waqf* school system in Lebanon for its decision to abandon the use of the Arabic language in the teaching of Mathematics and the Sciences. As we shall see in

the course of this study, the renunciation of Arabic as a language of instruction (especially in the field of Sciences) was a longtime Aklian objective. The fact that the *Al-Maqaased*—which was long viewed as an inculcator of Arabist values in Lebanon's private school system—can be perceived as a victory for the Aklian "language" program. This is significant because, in the beginning of July 2000, the Syrian-installed Lebanese government imposed Arabic as "the sole language" for the teaching of philosophy in public schools. Akl claims that "Lebanon's leading Sunni "parochial" school relinquishing the use of Arabic as a language of instruction, is partly due to his program, which had always been respectful and inclusive of Lebanon's Muslims" (from my correspondence with Gilbert Khalifé, a Lebanese author, journalist, and an associate of Akl's).

14. See *Lebnaan*, Year XI, Volume 450 (Beirut, Lebanon: 26 September 1986), 1.

15. Michel Chiha, *Visage et présence du Liban*, 18–39. See also Saïd Akl's *Ecce Libanus* (Beirut, ca. 1990), unpublished manuscript provided to the author by Akl.

16. Henri Lammens, "Evolution de la Nationalité Syrienne," *La Revue Phénicienne* (Beirut, Lebanon: Editions de la Revue Phénicienne, 1919), 206.

17. Lammens, "Evolution," 206.

18. Lammens, "Evolution," 200.

19. Charles Corm, *La montagne inspirée*, Third Edition (Beirut, Lebanon: Editions de la Revue Phénicienne, 1987), 103–4.

20. Michel Chiha, *Liban d'aujourd'hui (1942)*, 44.

21. Michel Chiha, *Liban d'aujourd'hui (1942)*, 24.

22. *Lebnaan*, Beirut, 26 September 1986 (Year XI, Volume 450), 1. See also "Bi-Kalimaat" [In a Few Words], in *As-Safir*, Friday, 18 August 2000, and *Ecce Libanus*, Article V, 2.

23. Akl, *Ecce Libanus*, 2.

24. Saïd Akl, *Interview*. See also Saïd Akl's "Al Marsah" [Theatre], in *Al-Mashreq*, year 34 (Beirut, Lebanon: January–March 1937), 42, 45.

25. Saïd Akl, "Bi-Kalimaat" [In a Few Words], in *As-Safir*, 11 August 2000, and 18 August 2000.

26. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1983), 133.

27. This point about the "vulgarization" and "intellectualization" of the "Lebanese language" will be discussed in greater detail in subsequent chapters. But it should be mentioned at this point, that in the context of an annual Saïd Akl Literary Prize, the Lebanese weekly *Lebnaan*—which is owned and published by Akl—established a weekly literary award (amounting to $250, or 25,000 Liras) aimed at middle and high school students. Participants in this weekly contest were required to submit an essay, on a topic of their choice, written in the "Lebanese language" and in the "Lebanese script." Below is a translation of the announcement as it appeared every week in the bottom of *Lebnaan's* front page. The following segment is from the June 24, 1988 issue:

> If You Are A Student
>
> You Can Win 25,000 Liras Every Week.
>
> Simply fill in the entry form for the "25,000 Liras Award" on page 3. Carefully follow the instructions on the entry form, and write legibly, preferably in print, and pay attention to upper and lower cases.

If your entry is picked, you can win 25,000 Lebanese Liras, and your name will be announced in the paper.

Write on a Topic of Your Choice.

Anyone in 5th Grade or higher, can learn to read the Lebanese language, and can begin writing in it immediately. It is simple and logical: each letter represents one *and only one* phoneme or vowel.

The Essay Must Be an Original Work, and You Must Write It Yourself, In a Style Commensurate with Your Age and Your Grade.

You can practice, with the help of your parents, reading Lebnaan, and writing in the Lebanese language using the Lebanese script.

Due to the unreliability of the Postal Service, it is preferable that you submit your entry in person to Fern el-Shebbaaq Post Office, addressed to:

Lebnaan Newspaper
P.O. Box 50515
Euclide Street
Ain Er-Remmani
Lebanon

28. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 133.

29. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 133.

30. Quoted in Kees Versteegh's *Pidginization and Creolization: The Case of Arabic* (Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1984), 135.

31. Joshua Blau, *The Renaissance of Modern Hebrew and Modern Standard Arabic: Parallels and Differences in the Revival of Two Semitic Languages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 7.

32. Blau, 12–13.

33. See Saïd Akl's *Lubnaanu in Haka* [If Lebanon Could Speak] 6th Edition (Beirut: Nobless, 1991), 299, 301–2, 304, 308. Throughout the narrative—of this 1961 collection of short stories—Akl never once referred to "Lebanon's native language" as Arabic.

34. Fouad Mashalany, "The Maronite Patriarchate," in *An-Nahaar* (Wednesday, October 4, 2000).

35. Barbara Young, *Prose Poems by Khalil Gibran* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1934), vii.

36. Saïd Akl, "Bi-Kalimaat" [In a Few Words], *As-Safeer* (Beirut, Lebanon: 15 November, 2000).

37. Saïd Akl, "Al-Marsah" [Theatre], in *Al-Mashreq*, 34th year, (Beirut, Lebanon: January–March 1937), 41–42.

38. Charles Corm, *La montagne inspirée*, 106.

39. Saïd Akl, *Interview*. Saïd Akl argued during our interview, that "God exacted his revenge" on all those who Arabized his name in the Bible and the liturgy. [. . .] "While He is incorrectly mentioned everywhere as 'Allah' [. . .] even in our 'Lebanese language,' He is still EL, even in our Arabized names; from Mikha-EL [Michael], to Gebra-EL [Gabriel], to Rupha-EL [Raphael], EL still supersedes Allah." This however appears to have been a fairly recent phenomenon with Akl, as the newspaper *Lebnaan*, up until its last issue (October 7, 1988) still used the Arabic name for God. *Ecce Libanus* marked the first written sample of the use of the designation EL in a systematic way. In 1999, Saïd Akl would publish *Missa*

Solemnis, the first modern Maronite Mass, codified in vernacular, and printed in the Aklian (Roman) script.

40. Saïd Akl, in *Lebnaan* (Beirut, year XI, Volume 450, 26 September, 1986), 1.

41. Akl, *Lebnaan* (26 September 1986), 1.

42. *The Gospel According to John*, translated to Lebanese by Kamal Charaabi (Beirut, Lebanon: Ajmal Ketub al-'Alam, 1970).

43. *She'af min al-Nahj* [*Excerpts from Imaam Ali's Nahju l-Balaaghati*] (Beirut, Lebanon: 1971), translated to Lebanese by Nagib Jamaaleddiin.

44. Saïd Akl proudly touts the fact that his associates are Muslims as well as Christians, as evidence of the nonsectarian nature of his movement. Gilbert Khalifé has (reluctantly) revealed that several versions of the Koran in Lebanese vernacular (and in the Roman-Aklian script) already exist in manuscript—and had been in the works since the mid-1970s—but that "for obvious reasons," no efforts have yet been made for their publication.

45. Lewis, *Babel to Dragomans*, 18.

46. Chiha, *Liban d'aujourd'hui* (1942), 49–52.

47. Chiha, *Visage et présence du Liban*, 162.

48. Chiha, *Visage et présence du Liban*, 163

49. Chiha, *Visage et présence du Liban*, 163

50. Chiha, *Visage et présence du Liban*, 163.

51. Chiha, *Visage et présence du Liban*, 164.

52. Labib Zuwiya Yamak, *The Syrian Social Nationalist Party* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Center for Middle Eastern Studies, Harvard University, 1966), 77.

53. Yamak, *The SSNP*, 80.

54. Nagib Dehdeh, "Evolution de la nation Libanaise," *Les Cahiers de l'Est*, Volume V (Lebanon, 1946), 15.

55. Dankwart A. Rustow. "Language, Nations, and Democracy," *Les Etats Multlingues: Problèmes et Solutions* (Québec: Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 1975), 43.

56. Rustow, 42.

57. Steven Barbour, *Language and Nationalism in Europe* (London: Oxford University Press, 1999), 9.

58. Barbour, 12.

59. Barbour, 12.

60. Barbour, 9.

61. Barbour, 10–11.

62. Quoted by Camille Abousouan in "Présentation," *Les cahiers de l'Est* (Beirut, Lebanon: July 1945), 3.

63. Kamal Jumblat, in *Les années cénacle*, 99.

64. Anthony Smith, *Myths and Memories of the Nation* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 152–53.

65. Chiha, *Visage et présence*, 144.

66. Chiha, *Visage et présence*, 166.

67. Chiha, *Visage et présence*, 147.

68. Chiha, *Visage et présence*, 149.

69. Chiha, *Visage et présence*, 153.

70. Chiha, *Visage et présence*, 153.

71. Jules Michelet, *Histoire de France* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1971), 6. This quote, from Michelet's 1869 Preface, recurs throughout the writings of Lebanese nationalists, from Saïd Akl, to Jawad Boulos, to Michel Chiha, to Charles Corm. See Nagib Dahdah's *Evolution Historique du Liban* (Beyrouth, 1967), 70.

72. See Lammens' "Evolution de la Nationalité Syrienne," in *La Revue Phénicienne* (Beirut, Lebanon: December 1919), 207.

73. See Lammens' "Lubnaanu Wa Suuria: Qidamu Ismihimaa" [Syria and Lebanon, and the Antiquity of their Names], in *Al-Mashreq* (Beirut, June 1929), 432.

74. Lammens, *Syria and Lebanon*, 432.

75. Lammens, *Syria and Lebanon*, 432.

76. Lammens, *Syria and Lebanon*, 432.

77. Lammens, *Syria and Lebanon*, 432.

78. Lammens, *Syria and Lebanon*, 432.

79. Lammens, *Syria and Lebanon*, 432.

80. Lammens, *Syria and Lebanon*, 432. Lammens noted that Phoenicia/Lebanon, and Palestine were not part of that administrative district.

81. Lammens, *Syria and Lebanon*, 432.

82. Fernand Braudel, *L'identité de France*, English edition (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1981), 263.

83. Toynbee, "Le Liban, Expression de l'Histoire," 43.

84. Toynbee, "Le Liban, Expression de l'Histoire," 43.

85. See Saïd Akl's "In a Few Words," in *As-Safir*, 29 January 2001, 2 February 2001, and 11 February 2001. See also *Lubnaanu In Haka* [If Lebanon Could Speak], 90–96.

86. Akl, "In a Few Words," 2 February 2001, and 11 February 2001.

87. Akl, "In a Few Words," 2 February 2001, and 11 February 2001.

88. Akl, "In a Few Words," 2 February 2001, and 11 February 2001.

89. Lammens, "L'Evolution," 206.

90. See note 69.

91. Braudel, *L'Identité de* France, 263.

92. Akl, *If Lebanon Could Speak*, 125.

93. Chiha, *Visage et présence*, 166.

94. Chiha, *Visage et présence*, 166.

95. Chiha, *Visage et présence*, 168.

96. Chiha, *Visage et présence*, 168.

97. Toynbee, "Le Liban, Expression de l'Histoire," 43.

98. Lammens, "L'Evolution Historique," 193.

99. Saïd Akl, *Sagesse de Phénicie* (Beirut: Dergham, 1999), 162.

100. Akl, *Sagesse*, 162.

101. Before succumbing to the Tai'f declaration of 1990, which finally acquiesced in the imputed Arabness of Lebanon—through a Constitutional article stating that Arabness—the Lebanese Constitution of December 17, 1926 and its subsequent amendments were never bound up by any such portrayals. For a copy of the Lebanese Constitution, see MAE, Paris, Série E-Levant, Syrie-Liban, Volume 266. For instance, Section 2, Article 11 (which only tangentially alludes to a hint of

Arabness) declares that "Arabic is the official language in all state and administrative affairs. French is also an official language; a special law will determine the circumstances in which it is to be used." Articles 1 to 5, entitled the "Fundamental Personality" of the state, simply delimit the perimeters and geographical location of Lebanon, its political and administrative make up, and the fact that it is "an independent and unitary state."

102. See the Lebanese Constitution, Section 2, Article 11, in MAE, Paris, Série E-Levant, Syrie-Liban, Volume 266. More will be said in chapter 5 on the significance of the semantics used to speak of Lebanon's official (administrative) languages.

103. Saïd Akl, *Lebnaan*, Vol. IX, number 398, Beirut, 4 November 1983, 1. In this article, Saïd Akl argued that "the thicker the layers of Arabic dye they put on us, the more convinced the world will become that Lebanon is not Arab."

3



Lebanon's Myths and Legends

Imagination may be compared to Adam's dream
He awoke and found it truth

John Keats

Anthony Smith argued that no matter how a nation is defined, neglecting the importance of its cultural and ethnic components can often lead to faulty readings of its identity.[1] Additionally, paramount to the self-image and continuity of a nation are, in Smith's view, the "myths, memories, traditions, and symbols" through which peoples, their past, and their heritage are defined and celebrated.[2] It matters little that those foundational memories and legends be based on historical fact or fiction.[3] What matter are the bonds that myths create among members of a nation, and between the latter and their—real or imagined—forefathers.[4]

In modern Lebanon, the official myth of origin harks back to the ancient Phoenicians precisely to normalize foundational memories antedating and transcending the new state's parochial and religious loyalties. The aim, it seems—to use words from Ernest Renan, whom many Lebanese nationalists delighted in quoting—was to create a "collective will to *become* a community," not necessarily to confirm the veracity, historicity, or the presumed common origins of the community in question.[5]

In his celebrated 1882 Sorbonne lecture *Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?* Renan maintained that a nation comes into being when a collection of peoples come to recognize and celebrate their possession of certain attributes in common.[6] It is neither race, nor religion and language that bring a nation together; rather, it is a grand agglomeration of peoples with a collective

self-awareness of being one.[7] In that sense, if it deems itself a true nation, any community of people must have "common memories," but must also "know how to forget" certain—perhaps not too flattering—cycles of its history.[8] In fact, Renan considered forgetfulness, even "historical error," to be indispensable to the birth of a national community.[9] In the back of his mind were the 1572 Saint-Barthélemy massacres in Paris, a blotch on French national history and a turning point in France's "War of Religions" where some three thousand French Protestants perished at the hands of Catholic countrymen. In today's secular, anticlerical France, the Saint-Barthélemy remains a disgraceful statement on that nation's bigoted past, and a constant reminder of the importance of atonement and "forgetfulness" to the life and sanity of a nation. As a result, very few modern Frenchmen, Catholics and Protestants alike, would readily remember or discuss the atrocities of the Saint-Barthélemy. Indeed, fewer still would even know what the Saint-Barthélemy was. This is so, not so much in way of denying its reality, but rather in an attempt at warding off the events' shameful misdeeds and exorcising them from French collective memory. But "forgetting" in its Renanian sense meant not only blotting out a disgraceful memory; it also meant sometimes exaggerating positive remembrances and narratives, so as to obfuscate and smooth over the less than flattering ones.[10]

This conflation of remembrance and forgetfulness was eloquently encapsulated in the work of Lebanon's doyen of Phoenicianism, Charles Corm. Although not exactly a representative of Lebanon's official historiography, and a scion of a radical vision of a non-Arab (even purely Christian) Lebanon, Corm's Phoenicianist literary corpus certainly played a role in normalizing Lebanon's Phoenician myth of origin before aspects of it got codified into a pleasing official narrative. In his famed *La montagne inspirée* (The Hallowed Mountain)—an epic poem and impassioned testament to Lebanon's grandeur, considered by many to be the official canon of Phoenicianism—Corm urged his Lebanese compatriots to forgo and "forget" their modern religious identities—both Christian and Muslim—and restitute their ancient glorious Phoenician past, a time during which Christian and Muslim Lebanese alike, had been "proud and splendid humanist Pagans":

> If I dare remind my countrymen/ of our Phoenician forefathers,/ it is because in those times,/ long before we became mere Muslims and Christians,/ we were a single nation/ at the forefront of history,/ united in the same glorious past . . ./ Today, having grown,/ into what we've become,/ and by virtue of our modern religions—which are all praiseworthy—we owe it to ourselves/ to love one another/ the way we did/ when we were still splendid humanist pagans![11]

Corm, who was a proud and devout Maronite Catholic, who equated Christianity with humanism, appeared in the passage above willing to eschew his Christian faith in favor of a Phoenician Paganism, if that paganism were to result in Lebanese unity (and of course, in the recognition of Lebanon's non-Arab character). Therefore, forgetfulness in this case did not involve the suppression of a painful memory, but rather the blunting of a joyful one, one that was a source of great pride and strong emotion. But if ceasing to be a Lebanese Christian meant rekindling the Phoenician glories of yore—and repelling the specter of Arabism—then the means more than justified the end in Corm's view.

But Charles Corm and his cohorts equated Christian spirituality and morality with Pagan Phoenician humanism. So there wasn't really great loss for them calling for the abandonment of the Christian component of Lebanese identity. Phoenician Paganism for Corm, embodied what some have referred to as Christian humanism and monotheistic compassion. During the 1950s and 1960s, Saïd Akl would take this fusion of Lebanese-Christian-Pagan metaphors to paroxysms never before attained by Corm. Indeed, Akl would make such claims as: a) monotheism and the very idea of a compassionate creator were a Phoenician-Lebanese progeny; b) the humanist message of Christianity was articulated in, and emanated from Phoenician Lebanon (more exactly from the Shi'ite southern Lebanese town of Cana where, according to the Gospel of John, Jesus had turned water into wine); c) even a compassionate Islam was a Lebanese idea, born in the ancient Phoenician city of Baalbek, from the fossils of ancient Pagan beliefs, unearthed, restituted and adapted to Lebanese Islam by the famous eighth-century Shi'ite Imam, Abdel Rahman al-Awza'i.[12]

In fact, with Saïd Akl, both Islam and Christianity would become modern incarnations of Phoenician humanist paganism. In this sense the Muslim-Lebanese would, like their Christian counterparts, become bona fide descendants of the ancient Phoenicians not in contradiction with their Muslim beliefs, nor in spite of their rigorous Muslim monotheism, but rather *because* of them. It is interesting to note that the birthday of Abdel Rahman al-Awza'i, on February 9,707 AD, coincided with the death of St. John Maron, the first Patriarch of the Maronites, and to some Maronite historians, the founder of "the Maronite nation."[13] This coincidence, in the view of a Lebanese historian of al-Awza'i's, can be seen as nothing short of Destiny's will to pass the torch on (from a Christian, to a Muslim), to make both a Lebanese Christian and Muslim into the cornerstones of Lebanese identity and modern Lebanese nationalism.[14] Saïd Akl was well aware of this date's symbolic significance. That is why *Ecce Libanus*, a "new Lebanese Constitution" he published in 1990, counted al-Awza'i among "the world's eleven noteworthy Lebanese" who bequeathed to mankind the basic ingredients of humanism, benevolence, and progress.[15]

Thus, a genetic kinship was elaborated between Pagan-Phoenician and Christian-Muslim Lebanon to enhance the elements of a complete Lebanese nation, and provide a pleasing pantheistic, heteroclite and inclusive Lebanese identity, a Lebanese version, as it were, of the American *e pluribus unum*.

This idealization of forgetfulness and exaggeration of past glories—even historical error—seemed to have been suitable for Lebanon. In the coming chapters Saïd Akl will demonstrate the crucial importance of historical amnesia, overexaggeration, and sometimes inaccuracy, to the building of a coherent and cohesive national edifice and to the construction of national memory and identity. However, the "academic" foundations of this triumvirate—what would become one of the main premises of "Lebanonness" and Lebanonism—were certainly laid down by those who preceded Akl; primarily by Henri Lammens, and namely in his 1919 lecture, *L'Evolution historique de la nationalité Syrienne* (The Historical Evolution of the Syrian Nation).

However, in a still inchoate form, the overexaggerated idea of an everlasting timeless unique Lebanon had already begun making forays in the writings of Maronite historians such Tanios Chidiac as early as 1855.[16] Chidiac, who seems to have even met Ernest Renan during the latter's 1860 *Mission de Phénicie* excavations on the Lebanese coast, was the first modern Lebanese historian to have written a history of Lebanon—rather than a chronicle of his own ethnoreligious community as had been the habit of his Druze and Maronite contemporaries and predecessors.[17] Prior to Chidiac, writing a history of Lebanon emanated mainly from a "[t]raditional Maronite [. . .] expression of national pride. As a small and closely knit community surrounded by enemies, the Maronites tended to be deeply interested in their own history, taking pride in having retained their identity through many changes of fortune."[18] Therefore, the Lebanon written about by pre-twentieth-century Maronites was essentially a Maronite Lebanon, and its authors were thoroughly self-serving, often "dogmatic in their assertions and denials of historical fact."[19] Consequently, their history, although occasionally fusing Mount Lebanon with the Phoenician coast—often giving the impression of being a history of the modern, pluralist, multiethnic Lebanese Republic—remained essentially communal testimonials and uncritical hagiographies, interested mainly in Maronite rather than strictly "Lebanese" matters.

Accordingly, Chidiac's *Akhbar al-A'yan fi Jabal-Lubnan* (Chronicles of Mount Lebanon's Notables) was concerned primarily with the story of Mount Lebanon from the beginning of the Arab conquest (ca. 660) until 1855. Nevertheless, Chidiac's story provided a detailed description of "geographical" Lebanon with a special attention to the "Phoenician" coastal cities of Tripoli, Byblos, Jounié, Beirut, Tyre, and Acre.[20] This was

the first time in modern Lebanon's history that a serious local historian would attempt to weave a thread of physical, historical, and spiritual continuity between the Lebanese Mountain, the Phoenician coast, and their modern inhabitants.[21] Indeed, having been a student of a leading Maronite seminary school, the College of Ain Warqa, and having imbued the rudiments of Syriac language and Maronite history there, it was not surprising for Chidiac to have tried twining the ancient Phoenicians to the "Lebanese" of his time. This drove historian David Gordon to argue that Chidiac was the first Lebanese—rather than Maronite—historian to have introduced "the idea that the Lebanese were direct heirs of the Phoenicians."[22]

But going back to Anthony Smith and Ernest Renan's proposed underpinnings of identity (that is, memory, forgetfulness, and historical error), it would have mattered little that Lebanon's Phoenician filiation was fact or fiction. More significant was that in today's Lebanon the symbols of this ancient ancestry, inherent or man-made, are conspicuous, perceptible, and widely acknowledged and recognized, even by those who might reject their "national" significance. Yet the main problem raised by Lebanon's Phoenician myth of origin lies not in its wide acceptance or rejection, but rather in its interpretation. And so, while some Lebanese might take this myth and its symbols to heart—and argue that theirs is a glorious six-thousand-year-old civilization predating the Arabs—others accept it only as an obvious aspect of "geographical" Lebanon's history, and argue that the Phoenicians were ultimately assimilated and superseded by Arab conquerors—and that, consequently, the modern Lebanese have simply become Arabized. In either case, the permanence of certain historical events and their primacy over others seem highly subjective. And again, reminiscent of Andrée Chédid's "*Comment te nommer . . . comment ne pas te nommer?*," even the interpretation of Lebanon's official legends and myths allowed some room for communal, subnational, and ethnoreligious bias.

THE BIRTH OF MODERN LEBANON

> Before all the peoples of Mount Lebanon gathered here, people of all religions, who were once neighbors, but who shall from this day forward be united under the auspices of a single nation, rooted in its past, eminent in its future; At the foot of these majestic mountains, which in prevailing as the impregnable stronghold of your country's faith and freedom, have shaped your nation's strength; On the shores of this mythical sea, which has been witness to the triremes of Phoenicia, Greece, and Rome, and which once carried across the universe your subtle, skillful, and eloquent forefathers; Today this same sea is joyfully bringing you confirmation of a great and old friendship, and the good fortune of French peace.

> Before all of these witnesses to your aspirations, your struggles, and your victory, and in sharing your pride, I solemnly proclaim Greater Lebanon, and in the name of the French Republic, I salute her in her grandeur and in her power, from Nahr el-Kebir to the gates of Palestine and to the peaks of the Anti-Lebanon.[23]

The preceding was an excerpt of Henri Gouraud's September 1, 1920, proclamation of Greater Lebanon's establishment; for many, a joyous occasion and reason for spontaneous displays of popular jubilation, celebrating national unity and newly found freedom. But in many ways and for many other "citizens" of the newly founded republic, this was not exactly a cause for revelry and ceremony. For, the modern Lebanese state that the French helped establish on the eastern shores of the Mediterranean was ambiguous and aroused ambivalence from the outset. It was based on a compromise between peoples who shared little in terms of national aspirations; a compromise that entailed a "double-negation"; a tacit rejection of Lebanon's ascribed Arabness, coupled by a repudiation of its Western affiliations and non-Arab affinities.[24] In the end, as put by Georges Naccache during those heady times, "the Lebanon that they stitched together was a homeland made up of two-fifth columns. [. . .] And in toiling to spurn both East and West, our leaders ended up losing their bearings."[25]

As Andrée Chédid made clear earlier, Lebanon as a concept, an identity, a symbol and a homeland, was vague and deceptive. Not only was it diverse topologically, climatically, culturally, sociologically, ethnoreligiously, and linguistically; it was manifold even in its own perception of itself, and that was what in turn rendered it amorphous as a political entity. Some have argued that Lebanon was illusory precisely on account of its nature as a compromise, because it was meant to be perceived the way each of its national components chose or were predisposed to perceive it. After all, modern Lebanon was conceived and established mainly by mercantile elites and religious leaders who were eager to create a polity for Eastern Christians to be sure, but who were at the same time apprehensive of forfeiting potential trade and commercial ties with an emerging Arab market. At the end of the day, the architects of Lebanon's "two negations" formula created an entrepôt rather than a coherent integrative nation. Therefore, "the Great Land Bridge,"[26] the "Crossroads of Civilizations," "Christendom's Eastern extremity," "Islam's window to Europe," and "Lebanon the hyphen" and intermediary between East and West all became attributes that were normalized into a pleasing official Lebanese narrative, but attributes that nevertheless failed to unite disparate peoples into a single nation.[27] Again, to paraphrase Georges Naccache, Lebanon, prevented from reveling in its multiplicity, ended up becoming "neither

this, nor that."[28] But how can children of the catacombs, how can Middle Eastern minoritarians and offspring of millenarian traditions and multiple identities be reduced to a single simple identity?

Speaking of Levantines, with whom the Lebanese are often associated, historian Albert Hourani scoffed at their hybrid, malleable, adaptable nature. "To be a Levantine," Hourani said,

> is to live in two worlds or more at once, without belonging to either; to be able to go through all the external forms which indicate the possession of a certain nationality, religion or culture, without actually possessing it. It is no longer to have a standard of values of one's own, not to be able to create but only to imitate; and so not even to imitate correctly, since that also needs a certain originality. It is to belong to no community and to possess nothing of ones own. It reveals itself in lostness, pretentiousness, cynicism and despair.[29]

Nothing could have described the Lebanese of today more accurately. Indeed, as we saw earlier, the very cosmopolitanism, multiculturalism, multilingualism, and urbane sophistication that characterized the Levantine in Hourani's derisive description, were all elements of pride and cherished attributes that Lebanese nationalists often vaunted, mainly to mark their cultural distinction and distance themselves from their Arab neighbors. In a sense, the characteristics that Hourani was ridiculing were the very attributes of Lebanon that Lebanese nationalists aimed to project. But contrary to Hourani's unflattering portrayal of the Levantine as culturally amorphous and creatively staid and imitative, the Lebanese nationalists saw themselves as creators and conduits of universal values.[30] Therefore, by projecting an image of a multilayered identity, the new Lebanese state was made to be at once everything to everyone: a place where Muslims could still revel in their Arab heritage and identity, and where Christians could unashamedly flaunt and cling to their own distinct character. Thus, the Ottoman autonomous Sanjak of Mount Lebanon (which, to some modern Lebanese had essentially been an atavistic manifestation of a modern Maronite national-home) was expanded into the present Lebanese Republic.

However, this expanded version of historical Mount-Lebanon adulterated the purely Christian character of the mountain province, and forced the Muslims of the surrounding former Ottoman provinces (namely Damascus and Beirut) into a union to which they were loath from the start.[31] The end result was that a heterogeneous people were forced to live together, with Christians smugly thinking that time and economic expediency will "Lebanonize" the Muslim component of the state, and Muslims hoping that in time the Christians will come around and "rediscover"

their Arabness. Neither expectation materialized. The Christians became more obdurate in their aim to differ, and the Muslims never acquired the taste or the stomach for the idea of a distinct Lebanon separate from the "Syrian hinterland" and Arab neighborhood. Hence developed the Christian instinct of rejecting even the subtlest hints of an Arab component to their identity, and in time, this rejection of Arabism became the tool with which Lebanon's Christians would counter their Muslim compatriots' disputation of Lebanon's legitimacy and historicity as a distinct non-Arab entity in the midst of an Arab sea.

But there remained the issue of Lebanon's national language and the Lebanese people's use of the Arabic language. Lebanese nationalists responded to this accusation with Renanian standards: that a common language is not a crucial national trademark; that language is a means of communication which is often the outcome of imperial encroachment; that man has always adopted and spoken the languages of his conquerors; that Irishmen and other Anglophones speak English but are not Englishmen, and so on.[32] Then came other vaunted variations on Renan's repudiation of language as a meaningful parameter of national identity, which, over time, became incantations with which Lebanese nationalists held Arab nationalism at bay, and amulets with which they warded off assimilation into the Arab world. With Renan, they maintained that it took much more than language to define a people, that "a nation is a soul and a spiritual principle; two things that are in reality but one";[33] that the nation was above all "the possession, in common, of a rich legacy of memories, [. . .] and a desire to live together";[34] that the nation was "like the individual, [. . .] the end result of a long past ripe with struggles, sacrifices and devotion to duty."[35] Finally, like Renan, the Lebanese nationalists insisted that the remembrance, veneration, and idolization of one's ancestors were some of the most legitimate rituals in the life of a nation; that that was so, primarily, because "ancestors were the ones who have made us who we are, and have fashioned our past, our glory, our memories, and our great men, [. . .] and that these very memories of ancestors were the stuff of the social capital upon which should rest the idea of a nation."[36] Having common glories in the past, a common will in the present, having accomplished great feats together, wanting to accomplish some more . . . those are the conditions essential to becoming a people; not language! Languages come and go with the conquerors who wield and impose them, according to those Lebanese smitten with Renan! They claimed that, throughout their long history, the Lebanese had spoken Canaanite Phoenician and Hebrew, Aramaic and Syriac, Greek, Latin, and French, and most recently Arabic, Turkish and English (to name but a few).[37] Yet they can be claimed to neither Greek nor Turkish cultures. So why brand them as Arabs? The Lebanese were guests to all of those

languages, they claimed; yet they've enriched all of them and left on all of them their noble markings, their warm inflections and their passionate timber.[38] To stamp them with the epithet Arab, simply on account of their modern use of an Arabic dialect—Saïd Akl, we shall see, even disputes the claim that the Lebanese demotic is an Arabic dialect—is tantamount to restricting them to a limited period of their long history and confining them to the narrow predilections of political Arabism—when they are, in fact, timeless and universalistic.

THE OFFICIAL NARRATIVE

Up until the early 1990s, official Lebanese history textbooks taught young pupils about their nation's origins by retracing the history of Lebanon from the Stone Ages, through the Canaanite and Phoenician era, to modern times, ending in Lebanon's declaration of independence in 1943.[39] This excursion in the grooves of time, tickled the imagination of young Lebanese with exploits of "intrepid Phoenician ancestors," Greco-Roman epic tales, and stories of visits by Jesus Christ to coastal Phoenicia.[40] There was also a reasonably large section about the seventh-century Arab *Fateh* (conquest), a relatively innocuous—not to say sympathetic—segment about the Crusades, the story of a dismal Ottoman period, and an exuberant account of the establishment of a sixteenth-century "Lebanese principality" under the "Prince of Phoenicia," the "heroic" Emir Fakhreddine the Great.[41] Indeed, the myth of the Emir Fakhreddine became one of the foundational narratives of Modern Lebanon's history. One such story culled from this sequence was depicted in Gérard de Nerval's 1840 *Voyage en Orient*. In his narrative about Fakhreddine, de Nerval described the "Lebanese hero" not only as the founder of modern Lebanon, but also as a descendent of ancient Phoenicians and a scion of the noble Frankish Dreux dynasty.[42] Thus, according to de Nerval, Fakhreddine was received at the Court of the Medicis in 1613, with ceremony and affection betraying the great regard with which Europe held a kindred nation—namely Lebanon—religiously and culturally affiliated with the Duchy of Tuscany.[43] De Nerval wrote:

> In Florence, Fakhreddine was received as a philosopher and an inheritor of ancient Greek knowledge. [. . .] In France, he was seen as the descendent of some aged Crusaders who had taken refuge in Lebanon's mountains during the reign of Saint Louis. [The French] have also attempted, through etymological alliteration, to establish some kinship [between Fakhreddin, a Druze] and a certain Comte de Dreux. In Florence [Fakhreddine] passed for a Christian, and he might as well had converted to Christianity, as had in our time one of his successors, the Emir Bashir. [. . .] For a time, Fakhreddine condensed the ideals that we assume were those of Hiram, the ancient

> King of Lebanon, friend of Solomon [. . .] Master of the entire Phoenician and Palestinian coast, Fakhreddine attempted to establish an independent [Lebanese] kingdom throughout Syria. However, the European support that he expected for the realization of his scheme never materialized. Nevertheless, the memory of him remains for Lebanon an ideal of glory and power.[44]

How could such glorious pedigree, romanticized as it might have been, be lost to the writers of modern Lebanon's history? Is it any wonder that the works of Gérard de Nerval, Maurice Barrès, Volney, and countless other Lebanophile Frenchmen, are cherished readings in the Lebanese official curricula?

Official Lebanon's glorious epic adventure usually ended with an account of the last tremors of Ottoman presence in the country. Here, the story of Lebanon's independence would be recounted in its goriest and most glorious details, as if to indelibly etch in the young Lebanese minds the last moments in the lives of those Christian and Muslim Lebanese who selflessly gave their lives so that Lebanon might remain. Thus, a horrifying gloomy picture of the Ottoman gallows in Beirut's central square is painted. And depending on the levels of devotion and seriousness of Lebanese Elementary School history teachers, a name-list of those Muslim and Christian "champions of Independence" who perished at the hands of the hated Ottoman executioners would be solemnly read in class. Then the clincher is spun! Through the glimmers of Beirut's first light, in the raw dawn of a rainy May 6, 1916, a fearless shackled Philippe El-Khazen would set out on his *marche funèbre* toward the gallows of the *Place Étoile*,[45] intoning a defiant *Marseillaise*. Then, pushed around, smacked about, a rope tightened around his neck and a noose securely nestled behind his left ear, we are told the intrepid El-Khazen audaciously carried on with his anthem, voice unflustered, head held high, barely missing a beat. Even as he lost his footing, as the collapsing trap-door began noisily swinging under his feet, and even as his body thrashed about at the end of his rope, the fearless El-Khazen, we are told, still managed to bellow out a final defiant "*Vive la France*," before his vocal cords ruptured and his flailing legs twitched into their final stillness.

A poignant and perturbing story, indeed, for impressionable prepubescent pupils. But one that usually sanctified a valiant "Lebanonness" in the eyes of the young, injected patriotic pride in their innocent hearts, and instilled in them a mysterious fondness for France. For, traditionally, this story closed with a happy ending, recounting the munificent "French mandate" which, the young Lebanese are told, delivered their land from the claws of a ravenous Ottoman oppressor, and plucked Lebanon out of centuries of tyranny, torpor, and incertitude.

Despite this narrative's obvious embellishments, despite its exaggeration of France's selfless benevolence, and despite its overwrought vilification of the Ottomans, it was an officially approved and venerated national tale.[46] It contained the three indispensable national ingredients that Renan spoke of—collective memory, collective forgetfulness, and historical error. It told us that Lebanon had always been a unique entity; coherent, everlasting, and unified. Yes, it had been conquered and occupied by foreign armies—Arab armies included—many times over throughout its millenarian history, but it was never subdued, it was never assimilated, it never ceased being itself, and its unique "Lebanese" essence remained unaltered.[47] This same official narrative also told us that Lebanon bequeathed its humanist values to the world, through its native Phoenician son Cadmus, and by way of Lebanon's surrogate daughter Europe. As the tale went, from the same official sources, the Greek god Zeus had reportedly been smitten by the beauty of a Phoenician princess named Europa (Canaanite Erev), daughter of Agenor, King of Tyre. But how is a god to seduce a mortal; a proud, princely circumspect Phoenician at that? Through artifice and inventiveness worthy of a Greek chief deity, Zeus assumed the form of a white ox, tempted Europa to climb on his back, and carried her off westward to the dark continent that would evermore bear her name.[48] Europa's brother Cadmus along with his two siblings Phoenix and Cilix were sent by Agenor to fetch her. All three eventually came back empty handed. But Cadmus, we are told, taught the Greeks—and through them the whole of humanity—a simple "Lebanese" alphabet, through which all of mankind's intellectual heritage would come to dwell for all eternity.[49]

In the late 1930s, Saïd Akl would hone that moving tale of "Lebanese humanism" in a civilizational epic poem titled *Cadmus*. Thus, in what Fouad Ephrem-Boustany later dubbed the "Charter of Lebanonism," Akl would set out to illustrate the role that Lebanon—"the nation and the homeland, the universal beacon of light and the creator of lofty civilizations and sublime humanistic values"—played as a "quiver in the body of the [torpid] East, and as a universal fatherland for the Truth."[50] Thus, according to Akl, it became Lebanon's moral duty and cultural mission, from the days of Cadmus to the present, to "Lebanonize" the world, to calm its fury, to smooth its rough edges, and to civilize and to rehumanize it. And so, appropriately, Akl wrote in his introduction to *Cadmus* that:

> Lebanon is homeland for the Truth. [. . .] Out of a vital, enlightened, and generous heritage, we [the Lebanese] have raised in these parts of the world, on these doorsteps of Asia, which wade deeply into the heritage of Europe, a homeland for the Truth. And we, its sons, have declared to the West [. . .] that we possess a mission toward it, a mission to calm some of its recklessness

> and folly, to enrich its activity, and to set its eyes beyond immediate gain. Six thousand years of patience and reason, six thousand years of contempt for material gain, six thousand years of sacrifice, self-denial, aspiration and thoughtful circumspection before rushing to espouse orthodoxy, have entitled us to become custodians of this mission, this unique mission which commands us to Lebanonize the world.[51]

Thusly Akl declared Lebanon, its mission, and the purpose of his own play, *Cadmus*, through the lapidary brevity of the first sentence of his Introduction; three terse, incisive, and thunderous (Arabic) words: *"Lubnaan Watan ul-Haqiiqati"* (Lebanon is homeland for the Truth).[52] Lebanon had also a proud and ancient Eastern ancestry according to Akl, but an ancient heritage twined into that of Europe. And so, Europe, its value systems, its laws, ethics, intellectual genius, and accomplishments, were all Lebanese bequests and a Lebanese inspiration. For those unfamiliar with Saïd Akl's thought, such claims sound nothing short of delusional. However, the poet's personal magnetism, his charisma and gravitas, the eloquence of his prose, as well as his impressively prodigious memory and predilection for citations, dates, and statistics, cannot but seduce his listeners (and readers) into accepting even his most far-fetched claims. From his lips, and under his pen, the "Lebanese origins" of Europe, the "Lebanese inspiration" behind Monotheism, and the "Lebanese-Phoenician" alphabet, suddenly begin sounding like universal verities, even to the cynic. But what is more important for our purposes is that Akl's play, *Cadmus*, its style, its symbolisms, and its similes became part of Lebanon's official history. Its narrative veiled less favorable details of Lebanon's story. Thus were exaggerated the exploits of the "ancient Phoenician ancestors," as was omitted the 1860 civil war pitting Maronites against Druze, and other unflattering—and therefore unimportant—chapters. Nevertheless, the skillful elaboration of such an engrossing story, providing a plausible uninterrupted vector of continuity between the modern Lebanese and their intrepid Phoenician forefathers, not only captivated Lebanon's credulous young minds, but also injected in them powerful sentiments of pride and affection for "Lebanon the Eternal."[53] Today, this seven-thousand-year-old heritage is visually and psychologically ensconced in all things Lebanese, official and private alike. From etchings and symbols on tourist guides and museum brochures, to university catalogues, corporate emblems, and school mascots, and from private and official websites to names of restaurants, hotels, wines, banks, private clubs, beach and ski resorts, and urban development projects, the names, memories, and symbols of ancient Phoenicia are a constant reminder of the living ancient progenitors of modern Lebanon.[54] Even Lebanese currency is adorned with symbols and artwork depicting Phoenician exploits: from Zeus's abduction of Europa, to the Cadmusian alphabet, and from Phoenician builders erecting Solomon's Temple, to the

ubiquitous Phoenician ships laden with cargoes of men, merchandise, and ideas. Phoenicia and Lebanon's Phoenician progenitors are normalized in official Lebanon's symbols and banalized in modern Lebanese popular culture.

In addition to the preceding, there are also the Lebanese toponyms, most of which have no known Arabic meanings according to Lebanese philologist Anis Freyha.[55] In fact, Freyha's seminal inquiry into the etymology of Lebanese place-names (*A Dictionary of the Names of Towns and Villages in Lebanon*, Beirut, 1972) opened the floodgates to tens of subsequent studies on a topic aiming to demonstrate Lebanon's distinctness from its Arab environment. In his work, Freyha has argued that "the language of Lebanon's conquerors *[Lughatu l-faatihi]* might be able to eclipse the language of the vanquished, but can very seldom eliminate time-honored native linguistic habits and indigenous speech conventions."[56] He attributed the non-Arabic Lebanese toponymy to the fact that "the Arab conquerors did not penetrate a geographic vacuum when they conquered Lebanon," but rather a complete civilized nation with its own place-names, rich indigenous literature, elaborate national symbols, and time-honored traditions, national language, and history.[57] Therefore, the names of Lebanese towns and villages, some of which might have, over time, acquired Arabized phonology, were on the whole Canaanite, Aramaic, and Syriac in origin according to Freyha.[58] Freyha even made the claim that, based on some of Lebanon's non-Semitic toponyms, the ancestors of the modern Lebanese had in fact been culturally, linguistically, and racially related to other inhabitants of the Mediterranean basin (not to the Arabs and other Semites of the interior), and that the proto-Lebanese had only relatively recently become assimilated into the general Near Eastern Semitic stock.[59] In other words, the early ancestor of the modern Lebanese archetype was not only non-Arab, he was also non-Semite.

Preceding Anis Freyha's philological enquiries by about two decades, Lebanese-American historian Philip Hitti would rely on Semitic botanical and topographic etymology—in addition to toponymic references—to bolster claims to Lebanon's non-Arab origins. Hitti wrote that:

> Lebanon the mountain offered no attraction to warriors, government officials, Bedouins or semi-Bedouins from Arabia. Agriculture was below the dignity of such men. Snow was no favourite of theirs. Nor was mountain warfare ever palatable to Arabians. A large number of plants in this conquered area [Lebanon], both wild and domestic, have preserved their pre-Arab Semitic names. Technical terms used in farming and agriculture are mostly Syriac and Aramaic, as are terms relating to theology and ritual (such as 'imad, baptism; karz, preaching; qissis, monk; mazmur, psalm).[60] The overwhelming majority of Lebanese villages still bear Aramaic or Phoenician names, not Arabic. In all, Lebanon comprises some 1,500 villages and towns.

> Those compounded with bayt (house of) or its attenuated form b (Bayt al-Din or Bteddin, house of Judgement; Bterram, house of the high; Bsalim, house of the idol) were mostly nucleated around an ancient Semitic Temple. Others compounded with ʻayn (spring) or mayy (water), such as ʻAyn Turah (spring of the mountain), Rishmayya (source [head] of water), owed their origins to springs of water. Other villages developed around forts: Majdalayya (tower place), Majdalun (small tower). A large number of place names are introduced by the Syriac Kfar (village): Kfar Faqud (village of the officer), Kfar Maya (village of water), Kfar Shima (village of silver). Even the coastal towns betray no Arabic influence in their nomenclature.[61]

This normalization, intellectualization, and popularization of Lebanon's non-Arab ancestry would reach its apogee in Blanche Lohéac-Ammoun's 1937 *Histoire du Liban* illustrated Children's books series.[62] In Betty Boop-like characters, reflecting the comic book and cartoon chic of the 1930s, Lohéac-Ammoun proceeded to recount the story of Lebanon from Phoenician times to Independence, by way of Betty Boop look-alike Phoenician characters and folk heroes made perceptible and attractive to young audiences. The books received wide acclaim and went into multiple printings (with a fourth printing by 1968). This intellectualization and popularization of a Phoenician-Lebanese filiation would take on a new facet with Saïd Akl's linguistic mission.

Still, in the opinion of Fouad Ephrem-Boustany, some of Lebanon's official history manuals—to the production of which he had at one time been a prolific contributor—remained, "without accounting for the flawed and narrow chauvinism of their clumsy and obnoxious propagandist designs, skimpy, distorted, and deceitful!"[63] This was so, in Ephrem-Boustany's view, because some of these history manuals endeavored to label Lebanon when Lebanon's identity was self-evident! They all, invariably, asked the same "immature question!"[64] "What is Lebanon? [. . .] Is it Phoenician? Is it Arab? Is it Latin? Is it Maronite? Is it Sunni, Shi'ite, Druze, or Armenian?"[65] "So many peddled and defended hypotheses" lamented Ephrem-Boustany, with so many misguided sponsors and buyers, when in reality "Lebanon is simply Lebanese [. . .] and a self-conscious country needn't a borrowed extraneous label" to define itself.[66]

We saw earlier that Michel Chiha echoed a similar notion during a 1942 talk he delivered at Beirut's Cèrcle de la Jeunesse Catholique, barely a year after Ephrem-Boustany's pronouncement. "La population du Liban est Libanaise, tout simplement," said Chiha. (Lebanon's population, to put it in plain language, is simply Lebanese.)[67] Was this a simple coincidence and a case of the meeting of great minds? Or was this rather a mentor-student relationship where Chiha might have been on the receiving end? It would be hard to tell with any level of certainty. Michel Chiha was born in 1891, and was Fouad Ephrem-Boustany's senior by about

eighteen years. However, both were educated at the same Université Saint Joseph, both blossomed under the watchful eyes of the same Jesuit scholar, the notorious Henri Lammens, and both were avid Anglophones who had completed (at least parts of their higher education) at English-speaking institutions—British for Chiha, American for Ephrem-Boustany. Years after his graduation from college, Fouad Ephrem-Boustany would take up a position as Lammens's personal assistant while overseeing Université Saint Joseph's Bibliothèque Orientale. Therefore, the possibility of both Chiha and Ephrem-Boustany having breathed the same intellectual fumes emanating from Henri Lammens's lectures is not farfetched. The important thing to recognize, however, is that whether expressing themselves in French or Arabic,[68] both Chiha and Boustany were elaborating on a topical concept in preindependence Lebanon, that of a unique sui generis identity. This axiom would become a celebrated Aklian leitmotif throughout the latter part of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first.

"I AM NOT ARAB, I AM PHOENICIAN," OR THE VULGARIZATION OF THE MYTH

The officialization of a nation's memory through school curricula and government sanctioned history books plays a central role in the transmission and diffusion of its legends and myths. In Lebanon the weaving of a common historical memory had the purpose of allaying (what Anthony Smith referred to as) often vying *communal mythmoteurs*, and propagating a sanitized version of history. But the transposition of these myths from the realm of intellectual elites, who usually do a wonderful job of cultivating and intellectualizing them, requires a more subtle process of simplification, banalization, and standardization. This process has the added benefit of making the official myth more perceptible to those outside the circle of the official "literacy" activities (which usually include public and higher education, the media, and fine arts). This places the onus of propagating the myth on the shoulders of popular (oral) literature and folk culture, which are usually the realm of those not necessarily exposed to the stuff of the literate segments of the nation. That is why, in this area, the vulgarization of a nation's memory often takes the form of folklore, local festivals, and popular music celebrating the simple traditions of rural life, customs, feasts, and rituals. Accordingly, in Lebanon, by way of a simple unpretentious *patois*, and in fuzzy dreamlike imageries wedded to plaintive pastoral melodies, the (illiterate) industrious shepherds and peasants of Mount Lebanon are mystically linked to some distant intrepid Phoenician forefather. The Lebanese diva Fairouz, through her

soulful voice—and by way of the hypnotic dialectal lyrics of her husband and brother-in-law's musical duo, Asi and Mansour Rahbani—was able to induce such endearing imageries and collective popular yearnings for the idyllic universe of the ancestors. In her simple bucolic drawl, Fairouz has for half a century connected the Lebanese to their roots and entreated them to take pride in their past and labor for its resurrection, just as their distant (Phoenician) ancestors had toiled for its construction:

> O my homeland,/ my orb of snows and Lilies [. . .]/ You are the mighty one,/ you are the wealthy one,/ you are the cradle of humanity,/ O my homeland!/ [. . .] The brawn of my forefathers/ Pitched your landscapes with cedar trees,/ The brows of my ancestors/ Chiseled the stonewalls of your terraced hills,/ And they dwelt within you since the dawn of time;/ One hundred years ago!!/ One thousand years ago!!/ Eternities ago!!![69]

The popular poetic universe from which the excerpt above is taken treated primarily the subject of yearning for the rural cultural heritage of modern Lebanon. But the Rahbani brothers and Fairouz were a modern living "anthropological museum" of Lebanon's life and history.[70] In addition to its nostalgic yearning for pastoral simplicity, their work, which had very wide popular appeal, internalized and normalized the historical depth of Lebanon, its timelessness, and the role that the Phoenician forefathers played in molding its character. Fairouz and the Rahbanis's work also vulgarized such historical themes which—as in *Fakhreddin* (1965) and *Flint-Stone Mountains* (1969)—rather than remaining the domain of educated elites, became the *mythmoteur* of the masses.[71] Again, regardless of whether the Lebanese were truly descended from the ancient Phoenicians, and regardless of whether Fakhreddin was truly the founder of the modern Lebanese state—or as proposed by Kamal Salibi earlier, the inspiration behind Modern Lebanon—it remains that these myths had become an important component of Lebanese cultural lore and accepted collective memories. The Rahbanis, Fairouz, and Saïd Akl played a major role in legitimizing and popularizing these myths, and for many years, Akl had been the trio's mentor, historical and cultural advisor, and sometimes lyricist. Most significant in this matter is the fact that only dialectal Lebanese was used in both the Rahbanis musical compositions and their theatrical productions. Furthermore, beginning in 1957, their close collaboration with Saïd Akl, who assisted in their choice of poetic and theatrical themes—in terms of style, language choice, and composition—played a significant role in transposing the Lebanese legends and myths of the literate elites' universe to the level of popular tales.[72]

Already during the years preceding the French Mandate and the establishment of *Grand Liban*, the Phoenician myth of origins had a pronounced

presence among Lebanese locals and emigrant communities in Egypt, Europe, and the Americas. In a memorandum dispatched in February 1919 by the Buenos Aires chapter of the *Union Libanaise* (or the Lebanese Union) to Aristide Briand (then French Foreign Minister and President of the National Assembly), the "Lebanese Desiderata" for an independent national state were detailed by way of a pithy excursion into the long history of "Phoenician" Lebanon.[73] Thus, a letter soliciting the French Foreign Minister's support for an independent Lebanese state would begin with the latter's initiation to the essentials Lebanon's history:

> On the shores of the Mediterranean sea, at the gates of this distant Orient, which has for so long transfixed the Superpowers' attentions, one can find in the midst of disparate peoples a small and steadfast nation, vigorous and determined, distinct from those that surround it: this nation is the Lebanese Nation. Its origins are quite removed in time. The Lebanese are in fact descended from the Phoenicians; the latter having extended their highly evolved civilization throughout the then known world, at a time anterior to the formation of today's great nations. Assembled in the framework of autonomous communities, the Phoenicians lived according to their own laws and their own customs, under the governance of their own local princes. Through their long history, they were subjected to the suzerainty of Rome and Byzantium, as well as to that of the Arabs, Crusaders, the Sultans of Egypt, and the Ottoman Turks. Nevertheless, they were able to preserve their own customs and national attributes.[74]

Thus, the Phoenicians were depicted not only as ancient relatives of the modern Lebanese, but rather as a direct progenitor, with whom the vector of continuity and kinship was never severed. Indeed, in this brief history lesson, the Lebanese on whose behalf the Buenos Aires chapter of the *Union Libanaise* was lobbying Briand, were referred to as simply "Phoenicians." In the same breath, all of those peoples who have conquered and ruled Phoenicia, from Romans to Arabs and Turks, remained outsiders and were never able to intrude upon—let alone subdue or alter—the ethnic and cultural authenticity of the Lebanese Phoenicians.

Along those same lines, in a November 17, 1921 letter addressed to the same Aristide Briand, by the president of the League for the Defense of Greater Lebanon's Rights (*La ligue pour la défence des droits du Grand Liban*, or LDDGL), Abdallah Sfer argued that "the Lebanese do not belong to the same ethnicity as the Arabs," and that there was never any kind of ethnic fusion between them and the Arabs.[75] Furthermore, Sfer claimed that "as successors of the Phoenician Civilization and as heirs to Greco-Roman culture, the Lebanese betrayed greater affinities to the West than to the peoples of the hinterland whom they have outpaced in culture and civilizations by many centuries."[76] Here, although some affinity between the

Phoenicians and Greco-Roman civilization is recognized, no such cultural blending is acknowledged between the Lebanese and the Arabs. We shall see with Saïd Akl how this vaunted affinity between Lebanon and the West—a prevalent theme among those Lebanese who rejected the faintest notion of an Arabic kinship—stemmed from the instinct of wishing to reintegrate what the Phoenicians were believed to have already bestowed on Europe, and what the Arabs had stifled through their centuries of domination. Saïd Akl was a major protagonist of this reading of Lebanese history. However, he argued that the emotional and cultural affinities between Lebanon and the West stemmed not from a perceived Lebanese imitative impulse, but rather from an innate Lebanese familiarity with a culture and a value-system that Lebanon had, anyway, bestowed on the West many hundreds of years prior.

In this same vein, the report presented by the Lebanese delegation to the October 1919 Paris Peace Conference—demanding the formation and independence of Greater Lebanon—contained a memorandum written by the Greek Catholic Archbishop of Zahlé and the Bekaa, Cyrille Mogabgab. In his memo, Archbishop Mogabgab reminded the French prime minister, Alexandre Millerand, that the stipulated "Greater Lebanon [was] in fact non-other than the Phoenicia of yore," and that the "Phoenician kingdom [upon which the modern Lebanese state was to be modeled] comprised, in the view of all classical and modern historians, the districts of the Bekaa, Baalbek, Hasbayya, and Reshmayya . . ." in addition to historical (Ottoman) Mount Lebanon and coastal Phoenicia.[77] This, in the view of Lebanon's representatives at the Peace Conference, necessitated the restoration of Lebanon's Phoenician boundaries. Indeed, these Phoenician references, according to Archbishop Mogabgab, incarnated the desiderata of "not only the Christians of Greater Lebanon, but also the overwhelming majority of our Muslim, Druze, Metwali [Shi'ite], and Israelite compatriots,"[78] whom Patriarch Elias Pierre Hoyek, the head of the Lebanese delegation, alleged to also represent.[79] In brief, the Maronite Patriarch, acting on behalf of Lebanon's Administrative Council, presented the following demands at the Peace Conference, in the name of all Lebanese:

1. Recognition of Lebanon's independence, as proclaimed by the Lebanese government and people on May 20, 1919;
2. Redemption of Lebanon in its historical and natural frontiers, and the restitution of the territories that were forcibly severed from it by Turkey;
3. Imposition of sanctions against those responsible for the instigation of the Turco-German atrocities committed against the Lebanese; and

4. Imposition of penalties to help defray the costs of reparation for the damages caused by the systematic decimation of the Lebanese by the enemy, and assist in the repopulation and rebuilding of Lebanon.[80]

In addition to offering compelling historical, political, and legal justifications and explications of his Lebanese demands at the Peace Conference, Patriarch Hoyek hardly missed an opportunity to summon Phoenician references in expounding his pleas. Thus, he maintained that:

> Lebanon's independence, as it was declared and as it was conceived by the near majority of the Lebanese, is not only an independence stemming from the collapse of Ottoman authority! It is, above all, a complete independence vis-à-vis any Arab state that might come into being in Syria. . . . Some have, through an abusive manipulation of language, sought to confound Lebanon with Syria. This is a grave error. Without even having to summon their Phoenician ancestors, it is quite evident that the Lebanese have always constituted a distinct national entity, separate from the groupings surrounding it, whether in terms of language, moral principles, affinities, or Western culture. And if, after a mere four hundred years of Arab occupation of Syria, the language of the victor has succeeded in seeping into Lebanon, it should be noted that numerous localities in Lebanon have maintained—and continue to preserve—to the present day their particular vernacularisms, demotics, and intonations. This, in itself, without even mentioning Lebanon's liturgical languages, is reason enough to deny the Arabic language any potential worth as a national attribute.[81]

Thus, the Maronite Patriarch making reference to Phoenicia curtly and only in passing, does so because in his view the kinship between the Lebanese and the Phoenicians was self-evident and needed not be elaborated. Not even Lebanon's liturgical languages—as an emblem of Lebanon's distinctness—necessitated mention. Lebanese specificity was evident in the way in which the Lebanese inflected "their particular" vernaculars. And as we saw earlier, even Henri Gouraud, in his famous address declaring the establishment of Greater Lebanon, could not help but acknowledge the Lebanese-Phoenician kinship. Thus, he described Lebanon as "a single nation, rooted in its past," a range of "majestic mountains, [. . .] impregnable stronghold of [Lebanon's] faith and freedom," and a "mythical sea, which has been witness to the triremes of Phoenicia [and which] transported through the world [Lebanon's] subtle, skillful, and eloquent [Phoenician] forefathers."[82]

Today, the significance of these Phoenician references is reflected in the (often shrill) opposition that they engender among Arabists, Lebanese and foreign alike. In a study entitled "Identity and Language Tension in Lebanon," Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) advocate and author of one of America's most successful Arabic-teaching textbook series, Mahmoud

Al-Batal, puts the onus of contributing to the fragmentation of MSA on Lebanon and Lebanese television networks. Al-Batal censures Lebanese television for making extensive use of Lebanon's dialectal language in newscasts and programs propagating themes and references suggesting a certain Lebanese cultural specificity and separateness from the Arab surroundings.[83] Although Al-Batal's study dealt specifically with the issue of language vs. dialect (and the dangers that the normalization of the Lebanese dialect posed to the prestige and symbolism of MSA) the underlying ideological designs of his investigation were quite evident. Indeed, in al-Batal's view, nothing could be more noxious to the vision of Arab unity than acquiescence in the seemingly inexorable fragmentation of the Arabic language.[84] What's more, nothing seems to have expedited that fragmentation more precipitously than the insolent Lebanese normalization of their dialect, and their determination to associate dialectal distinctness with national specificity—which, in the case of Lebanon, often translated into Phoenician references and ostentations.

Even our times' most cited Arabic television network, Al-Jazeera, dedicates a number of its programming to panel discussions dealing with such topics as "The Arabic Language and the Danger of Its Extinction," and "The Extirpation of Arabism."[85] In these news programs, often treating the alacrity with which "Arabic themes" and "the Arabic language" were being undermined, the blame is again placed squarely on the role played by Lebanese media and the pernicious—anti-Arab—influence of Lebanese popular culture in the region.[86] Indeed, after perusing a half-dozen Al-Jazeera programs, one can quickly note how the handful of "Lebanonists" (like the author and journalist Rafiq Rouhana, and the poet Georges Chaccour) who were routinely invited to participate in televised debates on language (such as the widely watched *The Opposite Direction*) were often hosted merely to be badgered and pelted with abuse by Arabist panelists and moderators alike. At times the "debates" seemed more like one-sided "inquisitions" aimed at baiting and shaming those Lebanese for having the audacity to privilege their spoken language—a lowly dialect as it were—and for daring recognize and uphold some non-Arab ancestor—a pagan Phoenician to boot—as cultural exemplar and progenitor.

Recently, in an editorial published on February 9, 2004, in the Beirut English-language newspaper *The Daily Star*, the syndicated columnist, Peter Speetjens, seemed annoyed with the prevalence "in certain Lebanese circles" of the locution "I'm not Arab, I'm Phoenician," which Speetjens used as a title for his piece.[87] Recognizing the right of the Lebanese "as anyone else, [. . .] to choose and define their identity," Speetjens seemed particularly dismissive of the "I'm Phoenician" expression, arguing that it was a "flawed concept."[88] "The statement 'I'm Phoenician' [. . .] somehow

implie[d] the existence of a nation-state called Phoenicia," which in the view of Speetjens was erroneous.[89] Another point with which the author seemed to take issue was the fact that "the word Phoenician is Greek," implying that the Phoenician civilization was perhaps inauthentic, given that the Phoenicians themselves never referred to themselves as Phoenicians but rather as Canaanites, Tyrians, Byblians (Gebelites), Sidonians, and so on.[90] It is not within the scope of this study to prove or disprove the existence of the Phoenicians, nor to investigate the authenticity of their name or their kinship to the modern Lebanese.[91] But it should be noted that the pervasiveness of this phenomenon (that is, vaunting the Phoenician origins of Lebanon), and the refrains disparaging such claims, could perhaps be viewed as tacit recognition of the significance of these Phoenician references (mythical and falsified as they might be) to at least some segments of Lebanese society.[92]

ORIGINS OF THE MYTH

Many Lebanese nationalists like to vaunt the fact that the term Lebanon has Biblical derivations, and that consequently, Lebanon must be at least as old as the Biblical narrative. Following those same thought patterns, the notion of a "Lebanese entity" matching roughly the topography of Mount Lebanon—sometimes even spilling outside of it to include regions in modern day Israel and Syria—dates at least as far back as the first part of the sixteenth century.[93] Contrived and embellished as they might seem, these notions of a timeless "Lebanese entity" with historical roots stretching back to Biblical and Phoenician times, are even lent academic credence by one of the fathers of modern Lebanese history, Princeton's Philippe Hitti. Indeed, in his monumental 1957 *Lebanon in History*, Hitti claimed Lebanon's written history to have spanned a five-thousand-year period.[94] In his Preface to the 1970 Arabic translation of *Lebanon in History*, Hitti wrote that the current (1970) president of the Lebanese Republic could recognize as counterparts and equals such predecessors as French High Commissioners, Ottoman *Mutassarrifs* (Governors), Arab *Walis* (Administrators), Crusader Princes, Byzantine Envoys, Roman Rulers, as well as Assyrian, Babylonian, Egyptian, and Phoenician rulers.[95] On the other hand, Kamal Salibi, another doyen of modern Lebanese history, took pains to avoid making more than casual references to a vector of continuity between ancient Phoenicia and modern Lebanon. Nevertheless, he depicted the Druze Prince Fakhreddin II—who ruled Mount-Lebanon from 1584 to 1633—as "the leading champion of Lebanon and the exemplar of the national leader who embodied the true spirit of the Lebanese nation and its lofty aspirations."[96] Thus, Salibi gave modern Lebanon respectable—and

a somewhat more plausible—four hundred years of historical depth, departing from the official and Lebanese nationalist mantras which spoke of a six thousand- to seven thousand-year Lebanese history. Indeed, in a 1970 lecture delivered at the Université Saint-Esprit in Kaslik-Lebanon, Salibi argued that "the legend of Fakhreddin" in modern Lebanon is "more eloquent than reality itself," and that the very history of modern Lebanon began during the reign of Fakhreddin; that is, when various districts on Mount Lebanon, and beyond, came to form a single jurisdiction, under the authority of a single local authority. In fact, wrote Salibi:

> thanks to his unmatched statesmanship, Fakhreddin was able to remove his country from the restricted context of the Ottoman universe and throw it open to the outside world. He was also able to occasion fundamental affinities attaching the disparate regions [of Lebanon] together and creating bonds between their religiously and communally diversified inhabitants. This community of interests outlasted Fakhreddin himself, and over time, gave birth to a coherent and visible Lebanese entity. And so, if some should argue that Fakhreddin was not the initiator of the notion of a Lebanese state—which would of course be a faulty assessment—one cannot doubt the fact that this Prince laid the foundation of the Lebanese entity that emerged after him. And this very entity could in turn be seen as the inspiration behind the "Lebanese concept" that was outlined by the legend that emanated from the name of Fakhreddin.[97]

As with regards to the political geography of the Lebanon assembled during the sixteenth century by Fakhreddin, Salibi noted that:

> Fakhreddin inherited the principality of the Shuf from his father in 1584. In 1591, he was entrusted the dominions of Gharb, Jurd, and Metn, in addition to the Shuf. He proceeded to seize Sidon in 1592, the Bekaa in 1594, Beirut in 1598, and Kesrouan in 1605. However, prior to taking hold of Kesrouan, he had wrested Safed from the Wali of Damascus. In 1610 he began campaigning to expand his authority to Acre and Ajloun, East of the Jordan. [. . .] In 1618, he annexed the districts of Byblos and Batrun [. . .] and in the following year he took the Sanjaks of Lattakieh and Jabla. [. . .] By 1631, Fakhreddin was in full control of a large part of geographic Syria, including parts of Palestine [. . .], Palmyra [. . .], and Antioch.[98]

Those are indeed the dimensions of "historical Lebanon" of which spoke the Lebanese desiderata and Lebanese intellectuals of the early twentieth century as they campaigned for the establishment of Greater Lebanon. Salibi outlined clearly the parameters of that Lebanon, both geographically and historically. Nevertheless, he was scrupulous enough to argue that, even though (geographic) Lebanon in the time of Fakhreddin resembled quite closely the current Lebanese entity, Fakhreddin himself

most probably never referred to his dominion as "Lebanon," since that designation was restricted to the mountain region stretching from the Shuf in the South to Bcharreh in the north.[99] Still, the body of Salibi's work until 1988, and especially his "validation" of the legend of Fakhreddin, substantiated the Lebanese nationalist myth about the timelessness and endurance of the "Lebanese entity."

However, Salibi would live to regret this tribute to the "Lebanese entity." In a tormented 1988 *A House of Many Mansions*, he would set out to demystify the myth he had so assiduously labored to legitimize in his scholarship of the previous thirty years. But, not to worry! The Lebanonist architects of Lebanese nationalism and the idea of a "timeless Lebanon" did not have to rely solely on narratives of natives, whether sympathetic or defamatory. European "Lebanophiles" were perhaps more objective, more ideologically innocent, and therefore more legitimate and credible observers and interpreters of Lebanon.

One of the constitutive elements of the modern Lebanese republic, and perhaps one of the key points of contention between those Lebanese who upheld Lebanon's Arabness and those who rejected it, was a certain romanticized image of Lebanon "the mountain refuge." This "mountain refuge" was often depicted as a space for freedom and tolerance, isolated from the fiendish orthodoxies of its neighbors. Indeed, this imputed particularism of Lebanon's, enthusiastically embraced by Lebanonists, and vehemently ridiculed by Arabists, was the object of veneration for a number of Western—namely French—travelers and missionaries, who visited Lebanon between the eleventh and nineteenth centuries. It was those travelers' wonderment before Lebanon's physical and anthropological peculiarities that inspired and emboldened the Lebanese nationalists of the early twentieth century and egged them on to pursue a trajectory of non-Arab, Lebanese particularism.

French intellectuals, diplomats, and men of letters, like the eighteenth-century historian Comte de Volney, who referred to Lebanon as "*ce rayon de liberté*" (this ray of liberty) in the penumbra of a cruel and oppressive Middle East, were indeed instrumental in animating the Lebanese national spirit of the early twentieth century. Nevertheless, "those Europeans who were smitten by Lebanon, did not engender this Lebanese national spirit per se," argued Saïd Akl, "they were simply perspicacious enough, and sensitive enough, to have taken notice of Lebanon's exceptional qualities, and to have described them, praised them, and eternalized them in their own works."[100] This recognition of "Lebanon's grandeur," according to Saïd Akl, had in itself perhaps ignited the spark that reawakened Lebanon's national pride and vigor.[101] But he argued that Lebanon would have remained Lebanon, the Lebanese "national consciousness" would have remained authentically Lebanese, and that the Lebanese national

movement itself would have remained what it represents today, with or without those Westerners' contributions:

> The people and authors of works, or even those who uttered mere sentences praising Lebanon's extraordinary character, were in reality nothing more than rivers, or simple streams flowing into the ocean of Lebanon's splendor. The ocean could've done without them and would have remained an ocean, but it nevertheless thanks them and pays them a royal tribute of gratitude.[102]

Saïd Akl was certainly cognizant of the West's contributions to Lebanon's twentieth-century national reawakening, and he was infinitely grateful to the Westerners' intellectual and psychological goads. But he was also so fervently convinced of Lebanon's intrinsic and boundless national accretions, that an eventual awakening was fated and irreversible in his view, with or without outside prodding. As far as Saïd Akl was concerned, Lebanon was not only a glowing historical verity; it was also a universal spiritual truth. And whether dormant or awake, truth in his view could never be extinguished, and consequently Lebanon—a pleonasm and a natural space for truth—could never wither away. This is a verity that was made abundantly clear by one of Akl's characters in his epic poem *Cadmus*:

> We shall prevail! Whether others will it or not!/ So stand firm, Lebanon, for there is not a blemish in you!/ We shall prevail! For there has to be Truth on earth,/ And there is no Truth, were we not to prevail.[103]

Saïd Akl's unbounded faith in his country's timelessness and the superiority of its ethos drove him to develop a notion of a Lebanon as "Creator of Values" and "Beacon of Light," or "*Le Liban Lumineux*" as it was often referred to in French.[104] Indeed, in the Aklian Lebanonist conception, Lebanon was not only the mastermind and diffuser of mankind's first alphabet, the tool and vector of all of humanity's subsequent creativity; it was much more than a "Phoenician alphabet" and a "Maritime empire." Lebanon's achievements and bequests to mankind, in addition to its flagship alphabet, included the concept of democracy, monotheism and the notion of a compassionate God, inquiries into the "atom," Stoicism, and the principles of Geometry.[105] In short, according to Saïd Akl, these were six exceptional and timeless accomplishments with which Lebanon had favored Europe (and by inference, mankind), achievements "which drove Victor Bérard to proclaim Phoenicia the motherland and progenitor of that 'abroad' called Europe."[106] Thus, in Akl's estimation, the contributions of European travelers, men of letters, diplomats, and poets, who visited Lebanon and praised it in their writings, were simply recognition

of Lebanon's exceptional character and admission of its past contributions to Europe itself.

In a story recounted in his Introduction to Georges Skaff's 1960 *Haqa'iq Lubnaniyya* (Lebanese Verities), Saïd Akl described an incident where Victor Bérard, a nineteenth- and twentieth-century philologist, geographer, and Hellenist of renown, who was also a French senator and chairman of the Senate's Commission on Foreign Relations from 1920 to 1929, expressed annoyance with visiting francophile Lebanese nationalists who were seeking his advice on a political formula that would attach Lebanon to France (as a way of protecting it from its Arab surroundings and guaranteeing its independence). This was during a time in 1921 when Henri Gouraud, the French High Commissioner in Beirut had been mulling over an idea of attaching newly established Lebanon to a projected Syrian federation.[107] Victor Bérard reportedly rebuffed his Lebanese solicitors who, in order to circumvent Gouraud's rumored Syrian Federation, were campaigning in favor of their young state's attachment to France.[108] According to Saïd Akl, Victor Bérard curtly told the Lebanese delegation:

> I don't understand you! You are given the privilege of being Lebanese, and you want to belong to another nation instead? Listen! No one is fonder of Homer than I! I have written thirteen volumes on him, and I have come to the conclusion that he wasn't even Greek. And today, my lifetime research on Homer entitles me to declare this initiator of Europe, this prince of poets, to have been one of your own, one of the Greats of Lebanon.[109]

It is unclear whether Akl took this locution of Bérard's seriously. But he certainly harked back to it repeatedly and anthologized it in many of his works and newspaper articles.[110] What is certain is that Akl truly believed his Lebanon to be the precursor and progenitor of Europe, physically, etymologically, spiritually, and intellectually.[111] Note that in this tendency, Akl was close to stalwart Egyptian nationalists such as Taha Hussein, Ali Salem, Salama Musa, and Lewis 'Awad—some of whom, we saw earlier, proclaimed Egypt to be the crucible of Mediterranean European culture, not an ancillary to Arab culture. Indeed, just as his Egyptian counterparts depicted Egypt as a cradle of Western civilization, so did Saïd Akl believe Lebanon to be "a constitutive element of the European realm, which is our times' fountainhead of enlightenment and humanism."[112] Lebanon was in Akl's view "the originator of Europe and its values."[113] Ultimately, the Comte de Volney, Alphonse de Lamartine, Ernest Renan, Victor Bérard, Maurice Barrès, Maurice Dunand, and many other Europeans who glorified Lebanon in their writings, were simply noble grateful Westerners who were repaying an old debt owed by their continent and their culture to their Lebanese benefactors.

This, of course, is not to diminish the aforementioned intellectuals' contributions to Lebanon's modern rebirth. It is they, after all, who were the first to have pointed out, and perhaps even overstated, Lebanon's particularism and distinctness from its Arab-Muslim environment. Without them, without the intellectual and emotional ties that they helped forge with the populations of the Lebanese mountain, Lebanon would perhaps have slipped more precipitously (and perhaps even more comfortably) into its Arab-Muslim surroundings, and would have more easily donned the Arab label. Thus, Saïd Akl was perhaps justified in his fanfaronade dismissing the Arabist claim that Lebanese particularism was a spurious European construct. In this sense, Lebanophile European visitors to Lebanon during the last millennium would have simply provided an academic platform to an otherwise authentic, endogenous Lebanese history. By simply giving intellectual moorings to Lebanon's distinctness, those European smitten by that land would have helped hinder Lebanon's dissolution into the Middle East's Arab-Muslim landscape, and they would have slowed down the atrophy of the Phoenician-Lebanese memory and identity.

Volney was a resident of Lebanon in1784. He was one of the first modern Western travelers to have provided a most thorough anthropological study of eighteenth-century Lebanon, a description which kindled the curiosity and inflamed the pride of his twentieth-century Lebanese readers. French educated Lebanese intellectuals such as Charles Corm, Saïd Akl, and Michel Chiha were indeed imbued in the spirit of Lebanon as it was depicted by those who, like Volney, approached it and praised it from the outside. Nothing was trivial and nothing defied description in Volney's travels. From people's habits, to peculiarities of language, food, and drink, to geographic details and agricultural methods, and from architectural features to local industries and weather reports, nothing escaped Volney's flattering paintbrush. And so, nothing in his portrayals of Lebanon was lost on those Lebanese who set out to rebuild their homeland's past glories in the early twentieth century. Lebanon was "un pays délicieux" (a delicious homeland) exclaimed Volney; "a charming country residence."[114] Maronites and Druze seemed like the only human elements that inhabited Lebanon, or at least the only ones that mattered and warranted mention in Volney's travelogue. Throughout his narrative, his empathy toward the Maronites and Druze was hardly concealed. Consequently, his reference to them as distinct, majestic, and enterprising nations, especially with regards to "la nation Maronite," was music to the ears of twentieth-century Maronites. In Volney's view, the Maronites' attachment to their ancestral soil and their manifest esprit de corps and unity, were distinct traits befitting a nation, in the European sense of the term. Similarly, Volney's antipathy toward the "pernicious and maraud-

ing" Turks and the other foreigners ("the townsfolk") that surrounded the "Maronite nation" and tried to stifle its autonomy and spiritedness, was not concealed either:

> The Maronite peasants [. . .] the nation in its entirety, is agrarian; everyone of its members tills in his own hands the little domain that he possesses and holds dear. Even the [the feudal lords] themselves live in that same manner. They all live in frugality, bereft of many comforts, but they do not live in penury. Needless to say, they lack many luxury items. In general, the [Maronite] nation is modest, but none of its members are needy. And if one happens to come across paupers, chances are they originate in the coastal towns, not in the country [Lebanon] itself. Private property [in Lebanon] is as sacrosanct as it is in Europe. [In Lebanon] the looting and injustice, so commonplace in the lands of the Turks, are nonexistent. One can travel [through Lebanon] by day and by night, in safety and confidence unknown in the remainder of the empire.[115]

In Volney's eyes, not only was physical Lebanon a geographical marvel to behold and a challenge to its neighborhood, it was a refreshing cultural, sociological, and political oddity in the Ottoman dominions of the East. So much so, that in his year-stay in the country, Volney claimed to have forgotten that he was actually still within the realms of the Ottoman empire. He wrote:

> I had forgotten that I was actually still in Turkey. Or, rather, if I still remembered that I was still there, it was in order to sense even deeper how powerful the slightest effect of freedom can be on a man.[116]

Perhaps Volney's most powerful attestation to Lebanon's distinctness, and the one that perhaps delighted the Lebanese nationalists of the twentieth century most, was his depiction of Lebanon's love of liberty and independence, and his comparison of its values to those of Europe. Indeed, the social values, habits, and moral principles of the Lebanese, the brotherhood and affection that they held for each other, and the attachment that they demonstrated for their native soil, were all European values and constitutive elements of a "nation" that were unknown in the rest of the Ottoman domains.[117] Thus, in addition to its natural geographical moorings, Lebanon's legitimacy as a "nation" was given historical depth and human authenticity. And this was all the more significant, not because this legitimacy was constructed through the expediency of Lebanese natives, but because it was perceived and praised by "impartial" outsiders. If Lebanon were indeed part of an Arab-Muslim universe, Volney would certainly have noticed it. Instead, Lebanon made him forget his presence within the Ottoman Empire, and transported him visually and sensorially across the Mediterranean, back to the Eastern doorsteps of Europe.

To further embolden the Lebanese in their national convictions and cultural self-assertiveness, there was Lamartine and Napoleon after Volney, and there were many others still, before them. Some two hundred years prior to Volney, there was the 1596 Jesuit papal envoy to the Maronite Patriarchate, Jérôme Dandini.[118] His book, *Voyage au Mont-Liban* (*A Voyage through Mount Lebanon*), dedicated a number of sympathetic chapters to the description of the privileged position, the prevailing liberties and the abundance that Mount Lebanon enjoyed in the midst of what Joseph Besson, another Jesuit resident of Mount Lebanon, called "nations of enemies." In fact, about a 125 years prior to Volney's famed "ce rayon de liberté," Besson referred to Lebanon as "un lieu de sûreté au milieu de tant de nations ennemies" (a sanctuary in the midst of so many hostile nations).[119] Dandini too, spoke fondly of the Lebanese people's steadfastness, inventiveness, spiritedness, and attachment to their land:

> These [Lebanese] mountains, through the hard work of men, seem on the whole no longer a mountain, but rather a flatland. By picking up stones dispersed here and there in the lowlands, men have erected high stonewalls, pushing the soil farther back, and erecting more stonewalls. And by so collapsing and pressing down the mountains, and by filling in the valleys, they transformed a barren mountain into a beautiful, fertile, and pleasing countryside, where tilling the land has become almost effortless. This land abounds in wheat, premium wines, oil, cotton, silk, honey, beeswax, wood, and wild and domestic beasts.[120]

Jean-Michel Venture de Paradis, who was the official interpreter of the French consulate of Sidon, and who accompanied the special French envoy to the Ottoman Empire, Baron de Tott, on his 1777 travels through Lebanon, emphasized the pleasant and productive life that even the citizens of Beirut enjoyed. He noted that "the freedom and tranquility of Beirut attracted throngs of Christians from Syria, who transformed the city into a warehouse for a flourishing commerce."[121] De Paradis claimed that the spirit of tolerance that the Druze professed, contributed to the establishment of a climate of harmonious religious equality between the Christians and the Muslims of Beirut.[122] Baron de Tott, on the other hand, remarked that Lebanon's steep landscape had always been a sanctuary of freedom and liberty for a number of communities, and not only for Christians:

> One can feel Ottoman despotism extend all over the coast, and end nearer to the mountains, at the sight of the first boulder, and at the edge of the first easily defended gorge. Meanwhile, the Maronites, the Druzes, and the Metwalis [Shi'ites], masters of the Lebanon and the anti-Lebanon, have always preserved their independence on these mountains.[123]

In this passage, Baron de Tott's description skirted and modified a time-honored Maronite—as well as a Phoenicianist and an "official" Lebanese—imagery. Indeed, Lebanon the inviolable shrine, the impregnable Mountain fortress, the refuge of persecuted minorities, the island of tranquility and freedom in the midst of an unforgiving and tyrannical Muslim sea, was a celebrated Maronite Christian motif. But with Baron de Tott, this Lebanon, and more specifically Mount Lebanon, the traditional sanctuary of the Maronites and other persecuted Levantine Christian minorities, was suddenly morphed into a peaceful, independent, and impregnable homeland and refuge for Druze and Shi'ites as well. In fact, even in 1777, Baron de Tott had succeeded in turning that exclusively Christian vision into a microcosm and an embryonic model for the upcoming 1920 multicultural, cosmopolitan Lebanese Republic. The Sunnis of Lebanon were mysteriously omitted from this ornate communal tapestry. But the Sunnis were also, in the eyes of outsiders and natives alike, affiliates of the Ottoman establishment, and therefore indifferent, if not outright hostile to the idea of a homeland outside of the Ottoman sphere.

Nevertheless, Baron de Tott's depiction of this spirited, sovereign, and tenacious Lebanon, must have served as an inspiration and model to all those who were to author the modern Lebanese state. And the outcome was a modern republic that would serve as sanctuary, and a space for freedom, for a number of confessional and cultural groups, including the Sunnis. Volney, de Tott, Lamartine, St. Louis, Napoleon, Bérard, and Dunand were perhaps the reason why narrow confessional statelets did not eventuate in place of the modern Lebanese republic. Indeed the horizons were made larger for those who were to establish modern Lebanon, by those Westerners who visited, got smitten, then left to write captivating accounts of the nation at hand.

And after so much praise by "impartial" outsiders, how could the natives, the future Lebanese, not have been drunk with national pride? Indeed, how could they not have resolved to devise a nation in the image of the one dreamt up and projected by Western observers, even if that nation had never really existed previously? The next chapter will pay particular attention to the life of Saïd Akl, and to the intellectual, cultural and political activities that he dedicated to the codification of a "Lebanese language" as catalogue, chronicle, and repository of a millenarian, non-Arab, Lebanese nation.

NOTES

1. Anthony Smith, *Myths and Memories of the Nation* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 8–9.

2. Smith, *Myths and Memories*, 9.
3. Smith, *Myths and Memories*, 64.
4. Smith, *Myths and Memories*, 64.
5. Ernest Renan, *Histoire des origines du Christianisme* (Paris: Editions Laffont, 1994), CCCXXXVIII/Nation.
6. Renan, *Histoire des origines*, CCCXXXVIII/Nation.
7. Renan, *Histoire des origines*, CCCXXXIX.
8. Renan, *Histoire des origines*, CCCXXXVIII.
9. Renan, *Histoire des origines*, CCCXXXVIII.
10. Renan, *Histoire des origines*, CCCXXXVIII.
11. Charles Corm, *La montagne inspirée*, Third Edition (Beirut, Lebanon: Editions de la Revue Phénicienne, 1987), 53.
12. Akl, *Ecce Libanus* (Beirut, Lebanon: 1990) Article IV, Section 4.
13. Matti Moosa, *The Maronites in History* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1986), 16.
14. Antoine Kazan, "Athar al-Imaam Al-Awzaa'i fii Takwiin al-Qawmiyya al-Lubnaaniyya" [The Role of the Imaam Al-Awzaa'i in the Formation of the Lebanese Nation], in *Les Dimensions du Nationalisme Libanais* (Kaslik-Lebanon: Editions de l'Université Saint-Esprit, 1970), 20.
15. Akl, *Ecce Libanus* (Article IV, Section 4, Item k), 2.
16. Lammens, "L'Evolution historique," 200. See also Kamal Salibi's *Maronite Historians of Mediaeval Lebanon*, Second Edition (Beirut, Lebanon: Naufal Group, 1991), 170–71.
17. Kamal Salibi, *Maronite Historians of Mediaeval Lebanon* (Beirut, Lebanon: American University of Beirut, 1959), 168.
18. Salibi, *Maronite Historians*, 15.
19. Salibi, *Maronite Historians*, 19.
20. Salibi, *Maronite Historians*, 70.
21. Salibi, *Maronite Historians*, 168–71.
22. David Gordon, *Lebanon, the Fragmented Nation* (London: Hoover Institution Press, 1980), 149.
23. Adel Ismail, *Le Liban, Documents Diplomatiques et Consulaires Relatifs à l'Histoire du Liban* (Beirut, Lebanon: Editions des Oeuvres Politiques et Historiques, 1979), Vol. XIX, 81.
24. Georges Naccache, "Deux négations ne font pas une nation," in *Un rêve Libanais: 1943–1972* (Beirut, Lebanon: Editions Fiches du Monde Arabe, 1983), 57–58.
25. Naccache, "Deux negations," 58.
26. Charles Malik, "Lebanon and the World," in Edward E. Azar (ed.), *Lebanon and the World in the 1980s* (College Park: University of Maryland, 1983), 21.
27. Philip Hitti, *Lebanon in History* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1967), 4–10.
28. Naccache, *Un rêve*, 58.
29. Albert Hourani, *Syria and Lebanon: A Political Essay* (London: Oxford University Press, 1946), 70–71.
30. Chiha, *Visage*, 162–64.
31. MAE, Serie E, Levant 1918–1940, Syrie-Liban, Vol. 126, Carton 313, Dossier 27, 81–89 (Letter from Robert De Caix, in correspondence with the Quai d'Orsay,

expressing the dismay of Muslim Syrians at the dismemberment of their country, dated from Beyrouth, February 4th, 1921).

32. For examples on this kind of discourse, see Nagib Déhdéh's "Evolution de la Nation Libanaise," in *Les Cahiers de l'Est*, Vol. V (Lebanon, 1946), 15; Chiha's *Visage*, 162, and *Liban d'Aujourd'hui*, 49–52; Lammens' "Evolution Historique," 200; and Selim Abou's *Le Bilinguisme Arabe-Francais au Liban* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1962), 86–87.

33. Renan, *Oeuvres Complete de Ernest Renan* (Paris, 1958) Vol. I, 903–6, also reproduced in the dictionary section of *Histoire des Origines du Christianisme*, CCCXXXVII–CCCXXXIX.

34. Renan, *Oeuvres*, 903–6.

35. Renan, *Oeuvres*, 903–6.

36. Renan, *Oeuvres*, 903–6.

37. For examples on this kind of discourse, see Déhdéh's "Evolution de la Nation Libanaise," 15; Chiha's *Visage*, 162, and *Liban d'Aujourd'hui*, 49–52; Lammens's "Evolution Historique," 200; and Abou's *Le Bilinguisme*, 86–87.

38. Corm, *La montagne*, 105–6.

39. See for example *Who's Who in Lebanon*, 1997–1998, 286. See also "History Lessons Stymied in Lebanon," *BBC News*, 8 April, 2009. news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/7988399.stm (8 April 2009).

40. *L'ABCdaire du Liban* (Paris: Flammarion, 1998), 11–26.

41. *L'ABCdaire,* 23–26. Lebanese tradition has it that Fakhreddine Maan II, the architect of modern Lebanon, had by 1623 ruled over an area comprising the modern Lebanese Republic, but extending eastward to Palmyra and the gates of Damascus, northward to Latakiyyé (and some even claim Antioch) on the Syrian coast, and southward to Acre on the Palestinian coast (see Kamal Salibi's "Fakhreddine and the Lebanese Idea," in *Dimensions du Nationalisme Libanais*, 108–9). Although Salibi argued that the expression "Lebanon" or "Lebanese unity" did not exist in Fakhreddin's terminology or national imagination (as the appellation "Mount Lebanon" during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was restricted only to the northern part of the modern Lebanese Republic) he claimed that Fakhreddine, nevertheless, enjoyed a "special national distinction within the Lebanese sectors" [of the Ottoman dominions] and benefited from the "spontaneous loyalty" of the various ethnoreligious groups that inhabited the areas of Mount Lebanon, Beirut, the Shouf, Kesrouan, and the South; "the nucleus" of the Lebanese entity to come, and the precursor of the modern Lebanese Republic in Salibi's view (Salibi, 109). Indeed, Salibi argued that the story of Fakhreddine was nothing more than a romanticized legend, elevated to the level of a national myth by nineteenth-century Maronite chroniclers in search of an historical justification of the Lebanese Emirate of Bashir Shehab II (ruled 1788–1841). But in Salibi's view, this legend had "more significance than reality" in that Fakhreddine constituted the cornerstone of the Lebanese entity that was to emerge after his death (Salibi, 110–11). Even in his searing 1988 vitriol (*A House of Many Mansions*) against the Lebanese entity, the Lebanese state, and the Lebanese national idea, which he had helped construct during the 1950s–1970s, Kamal Salibi still admitted that "Historians of Lebanon who limit themselves to this view [that Fakhreddine was indeed the precursor of Modern Lebanon] of the significance of the period of the emirate

in the history of the country stand on firm ground." (Salibi, *A House of Many Mansions*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988, 129.)

42. Gérard de Nerval, *Voyage en Orient* (Paris: Folio, 1984), 396–97. De Nerval seems to have borrowed the etymology tying the "Druze" Fakhreddine to the Frankish Comtes de "Dreux" from Volney (*Voyage en Egypte et en Syrie,* 1843).

43. De Nerval, *Voyage,* 397.

44. De Nerval, *Voyage,* 397.

45. Rebaptized "martyrs' square" in 1920.

46. See *Who's Who in Lebanon*, 1997–1998, 286. See also the tourist guide *L'ABCdaire du Liban*, 11–26, published in conjunction with the *Institut du Monde Arabe* in Paris, and with the participation of the *Direction Générale des Antiquités de Beyrouth,* which functions under the auspices of the Lebanese Ministry of Culture. See also Fouad Ephrem al-Boustany and Asad Restum's *Taarikh Lubnaan* [The History of Lebanon] (Beirut, Lebanon: Dar al-'ilm, 1938).

47. See *L'ABCdaire*, 11–26.

48. See Charles Malik's "Lebanon and the World," in *Lebanon and the World in the 1980s* (College Park: Center of International Development, University of Maryland, 1983), 4.

49. "Où vient vivre à jamais la Pensée apatride . . ." See Saïd Akl's *Sagesse de Phénicie*, 167.

50. Akl, *Cadmus* (Beirut, Lebanon: 1947), Introduction, 14–22.

51. Akl, *Cadmus*, 22.

52. Akl, *Cadmus*, 11.

53. This expression is borrowed from a daily television program presented by Fouad Ephrem Boustany in the early 1980s. The documentary, entitled *Lebnaan Ed-Daayem* [Lebanon the Eternal], recounted the same story that was then being propagated by Lebanon's official history books.

54. The back label on bottles of the Lebanese wine Château Ksara begins thusly: "The Phoenicians, the ancestors of today's Lebanese, were among the ancient world's first winemakers. Château Ksara is by far the oldest wine made in modern Lebanon." Never mind that the average wine drinker reading a bottle's back label would want to learn about some of the oenological characteristics of the wine she/he is about to savor! This information comes only as an appendage to Ksara's back label. First, Château Ksara must establish that the buyer of its product understands that the "liquid sunshine" in his/her glass comes from an ancient Phoenician lineage. "First learn, then drink!" seemed to be Château Ksara's motto. School names like Phoenicia, Qartaja, Elissar, Qadmus, and Adonis, are not uncommon in Lebanon. Even the Lebanese currency (the Lira) often displays engravings of Phoenician Trirems, traditional cone-headed Phoenician figurines, depictions of Europa's abduction by the Oxen-Zeus, alphabet-tablets, and other familiar Phoenician scenes and sites such as Byblos and Baalbeck. More recently, during the period of reconstruction following Lebanon's 1975–1990 civil war, construction companies and urbanization contracts and projects were anointed with such names as Melkart, Eshmoun, Hanibaal, and Elissar.

55. Anis Freyha, *A Dictionary of the Names of Towns and Villages in Lebanon* (Beirut: Librairie du Liban, 1972), XXXII. Freyha argues that the overwhelming majority of place-names in Lebanon go back to the early Christian era, "when

the inhabitants of Lebanon were known by their Christian name: the Syriacs [al-Siryaan]," XXXII.

56. Freyha, *A Dictionary*, XXXII.

57. Freyha, *A Dictionary*, XXXIII.

58. Freyha, *A Dictionary*, XXXIII. Beirut for instance, according to Freyha, refers to pine trees *(Berotha)*, or a plural form of water-well *(Be'eroth)*, 38–39.

59. Freyha, *A Dictionary*, XII–XIII.

60. See Michel Feghali, *Etude sur les emprunts Syriaques dans les parlers Arabes du Liban* (Paris: Bibliothèque de l'Ecole des Langues Orientales Vivantes, 1918), 87–95.

61. Philip Hitti, *Lebanon in History*, 244–45.

62. See Blanche Lohéac-Ammoun's *Histoire du Liban*, Fourth Edition (Beirut, Lebanon: Imprimeries SLIM, 1968).

63. Fouad Ephrem Boustany, "L'Enseignement Primaire Tel Qu'il Est" [Primary Education, As It Is], a lecture delivered during the Beirut Social Week, on May 3rd, 1941, in F. E. Boustany's *Studia Libanica* (Beirut, Lebanon: Editions al-Da'irah, 1986), 160.

64. Ephrem Boustany, "L'Enseignement," 159.

65. Ephrem Boustany, "L'Enseignement," 159–60.

66. Ephrem Boustany, "L'Enseignement," 160.

67. Chiha, *Liban d'Aujourd'hui (1942)*, 44 ["the people of Lebanon are simply Lebanese"].

68. Note that the talk given in 1941 by Ephrem-Boustany was delivered in French, and dozens of his publications were in French, although he is often identified with the "Arabophone" exponents of Lebanese nationalism.

69. From a popular Fayrouz song entitled *Watani* (My Homeland).

70. Farouk Mardam-Bey, *Liban, figures contemporaines* (Paris: Circé—Institut du Monde Arabe, 1999), 241.

71. Mardam-Bey, *Liban, figures*, 240–41.

72. Mardam-Bey, *Liban, figures*, 249. Mansour Rahbani admitted to me that under the mentoring of Saïd Akl, both Mansour and Asi were able to infuse a new spirit, new themes, new melodies, and a new prosody to Lebanese popular music; themes that emanated from Lebanon and that were unique to Lebanon, redolent with the fragrance of the mountain and the cedars, rugged, untamed, uniquely Lebanese!

73. MAE, Levant 1918–1940, Vol. 127, Serie E, Carton 313, Dossier 27, 10.

74. MAE, Levant 1918–1940, Vol. 127, Serie E, Carton 313, Dossier 27, 10.

75. MAE, Levant 1918–1940, Vol. 127, Serie E, Carton 313, Dossier 27. The League for the Defense of Greater Lebanon's Rights was an offshoot of Checri Ganem's Comité central Syrien (Paris). For more on the LDDGL, see Youssef El-Saouda's *Fi Sabil il-Istiqlaal* [For the Sake of Independence] (Beirut: Dar al-Rihani, 1968), 266.

76. Saouda, *For the Sake,* 266, and MAE, Levant 1918–1940, Vol. 127, Serie E, Carton 313, Dossier 27.

77. MAE, Levant 1918–1940, Vol. 127, Serie E, Carton 313, Dossier 27.

78. MAE, Levant 1918–1940, Vol. 127, Serie E, Carton 313, Dossier 4.

79. MAE, Levant 1918–1940, Vol. 127, Serie E, Carton 313, Dossier 4.

Contrary to Archbishop Mogabgab's claims, and according to the September 5, 1919 issue of the Paris-based *L'Asie Arabe*, the Lebanese delegation to the Paris Peace Conference was composed mainly of Christian prelates. Those included the delegation president, Patriarch Hoyek, in addition to Archbishop Mogabgab, Mgr. Mobarak, Mgr. Khoury, Mgr. Feghali, Mgr. Chehab, and Mgr. Emmanuel Phares, the Maronite Patriarchal Vicar in Paris. *L'Asie Arabe* gives a detailed biography of seven delegation members, none of whom were laymen. For more detail, see MAE, Serie E-Levant, op.cit., Vol. 56, Presse Syrienne, Francaise Etrangere, Carton 313, Dossier 4 (January 1918–September 1919).

80. See "Les Revendications du Liban: Memoire de la Délégation Libanaise a la Conférence de la Paix," in *La revue Phénicienne*, 236.

81. *La revue Phénicienne*, 236–37.

82. Ismail, *Le Liban*, Vol. XIX, 81.

83. Mahmoud Al-Batal, "Identity and Language Tension in Lebanon: The Arabic of Local News at LBCI," in Aleya Rouchdy's *Language Contact and Language Conflict in Arabic: Variations on a Sociolinguistic Theme* (London: Curzon Arabic Linguistics Series, 2003), 94–95.

84. Al-Batal, "Identity and Language Tension in Lebanon," 95.

85. See for example the Al-Jazeera's political debate program *Al-Ittijah al-Mu'akis [The Opposite Direction]* (a clone of CNN's *Crossfire*) broadcast on August 28, 2001, and an earlier one along the same vein, broadcast on August 1, 2000. Both debate sessions treated such topics as the "Extirpation of Arabism"; the "Revival of the Arab Nationalist Instinct, and Its Importance in Firming up the Arab Identity and Preventing Its Dissolution"; "Why Do the Arabs Keep on Rending, Fragmenting, and Crumbling?"; "Demotic Dialects and Their Danger on Standard Arabic"; "Strength of the Arabic Language and Its Relation to the Strength of the Nation."

86. *The Opposite Direction*.

87. Peter Speetjens, "I'm Not Arab, I'm Phoenician," in *The Daily Star* (Beirut, February 9, 2004), Internet version, Opinion/Editorials page. The dateline of the article makes its symbolism all the more significant. February 9 is an official holiday in Lebanon: *'id Mar-Maroun* (St. Maron's Feast). Taking a gibe at the Phoenicians and the Lebanese proponents of "Phoenicianism" on that occasion, can be viewed as a veiled mockery of the Maronites themselves who constitute the majority of Phoenicianism's proponents.

88. Speetjens, "I'mNot Arab."

89. Speetjens, "I'm Not Arab."

90. Speetjens, "I'm Not Arab."

91. For more on the Phoenicians, see Sabbatino Moscati, *The Phoenicians* (New York: Rizzoli, 1988); Georges Conteneau, *La Civilisation Phénicienne* (Paris: Payot, 1949); Jean Mazel, *Avec Les Phéniciens* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1976); and Raymond Weill, *La Phénincie et l'Asie Occidentale* (Paris: Collection Armand Colin, 1939).

92. I thought that the reproduction of a reader's response to Peter Speetjens's editorial could illustrate the emotion with which, at least some Lebanese, pursue the topic of their Phoenician ancestry. The fact that an article like Mr. Speetjens's was published in *The Star*, and the fact that a virulent response to it was allowed

to appear in the newspaper's Internet opinion section, are testimony to the significance of this topic.

> Your next flimsy accusation is that "the word Phoenician is Greek," which in plain English means that the Phoenician civilization is not an authentic [. . .], but a makeshift foreign (Greek) contraption. Well, Mr. Speetjens, the designation "Berber" in reference to the Kabyles of North Africa, is also a Greek label! Does that devalue the authenticity or the peoplehood of the Berbers, just because their name came to us through the Greeks [. . .]??? It seems to me that the Greeks named most everything in the Classical World, including the Arabs (who have incidentally used a term remotely close to today's "Arabs," only to refer to Nomads: "Urbaan"). In fact, those whom you are honoring with [. . .] the designation "Arab" today, knew themselves only as "Nizaar," "Qays," "Qurayza," "Kulayb," "Ghassaan," "Quraysh," etc., NEVER as Arabs!! The "Arabs" themselves never saw themselves as "Arabs," although they began to be designated as such by outsiders at some point in history, namely by the Greeks.
>
> The Swiss refer to themselves as Helvetians! Does that mean that the term Swiss is inauthentic because it is used exclusively by outsiders?? The Albanians refer to their country as Shqipëria, not Albania! Does that imply that Albania is fictitious also??
>
> Mr. Speetjens! With all due respect, allow me to suggest you stuck to journalism and left the issue of Lebanon's identity . . . to the Lebanese themselves. We know who we are, Mr. Speetjens! We know whence we came! We know who our ancestors are! We know who our conquerors were! And we know who our current occupiers are! [. . .] Thanks, but no thanks Mr. Speetjens! We saw what the contrived Arabness that you are still peddling has engendered over the past miserable century!

93. Salibi, "Fakhreddin II," 85.

94. Philippe Hitti, *Lebanon in History* (Arabic Translation), (Beirut, Lebanon: Dar al-Thaqafa, 1985), 4. The Arabic translation wrongly titles the book "The History of Lebanon."

95. Hitti, *Lebanon in History,* 4–5. (Note Henri Lammens's remark about the Aramaeans' [the Syro-Lebanese] amazing ability to assimilate and adapt their conquerors to their own culture.)

96. Hitti, *Lebanon in History,* 4–5.

97. Salibi in *Les Dimensions,* 110–11.

98. Salibi in *Les Dimensions,* 107–8.

99. Salibi in *Les Dimensions,* 108.

100. Akl, *Interview*. See also "The Expression 'Arab World' Is a Conspiracy against Lebanon," in *Lebnaan*, Vol. XI, number 512 (March 14, 1986), 1, and Corm's *La montagne,* 13 and 39. Corm dedicated two books in this epic poem to the "Memory of Maurice Barrès who was able to understand us [Lebanese] because he so loved us," and to "the Memory of Victor Bérard who restored to us [Lebanese] a rightful component of our contributions to the legacy of Mankind."

101. Akl, *Interview*.

102. Akl, *Interview* (les personnes, et les auteurs d'ouvrages ou même de simples phrases, qui constatèrent que le Liban était un pays non ordinaire, n'ont été, en réalité, que des fleuves ou des ruisseaux qui se sont versés dans l'océan de la splendeur Libanaise. L'océan aurait pu s'en passer, et demeurer océan. Mais nous les remercions, cependant, et nous leur rendons royal hommage).

103. Akl, *Cadmus*, Fourth Edition (Beirut: Noblesse, 1991), in *Shi'ruhu wa al-Nathr* [His Poetry and Prose], Vol. I, 219.

104. Akl, *Cadmus*, First and Second Editions (Beirut, 1937 and 1944), 11 and 24–25.

105. In this regard, we shall see later that even Christianity, which became a significant constitutive element of modern European civilization, was also the outcome of a uniquely Lebanese experience. According to Akl, Jesus Christ himself was not Lebanese, but his ministry was born in Lebanon, and it would not have become what it became, were it not for the role played by Lebanon.

106. Akl, *Ecce Libanus*, 1. See also *Lebnaan*, Vol. XI, number 512 (March 14, 1986), 1. See also Victor Bérard's *Les Phéniciens et l'Odyssée: Tome II, Mer Rouge et Méditerannée* (Paris: Armand-Colin, 1927), 359–60.

107. MAE, Série E, Levant 1918–1940, Syrie-Liban, Vol. 127. See Gouraud's response to a speech given at Diman (summer residence of the Maronite Patriarch) on Friday, September 23rd, 1921. Patriarch Hoyek concluded his speech with "My General, we trust you, and we trust France; but no one should touch Lebanon's independence, otherwise the whole country will rise up in revolt." At that point, Gouraud reportedly stood up and exclaimed, "Your Grace, I am surprised to hear these words emanate from you. How so? Lebanon's independence is at risk? Is it to me that you're saying these words? To me? The author of Maysalun? The one whose soldiers gave Lebanon its independence?"

See also the refusal of such a proposal by the Alliance Libanaise (March 17, 1921), in MAE, Série E, Levant 1918–1940, Vol. 126. There were also a number of telegrams signed by Checri Ganem and Jean de Freige, categorically rejecting any notion of a Lebanese confederacy with Syria (dated March 31, 1921) in MAE, Série E, Levant 1918–1940, Vols. 126–28. See also Youssef El-Sawda's *Fii Sabiili l-Istiqlaal* [The Case for Independence], Beirut 1967, 338–40. El-Sawda relates a confrontation he had with General Gouraud on August 8, 1921, in reaction to the latter's mulling over the idea of a Syro-Lebanese federation—a few weeks before abandoning it during his meeting with the Maronite Patriarch at Diman.

108. Akl, "Al-'Umma l-'Uzhma" [the Great Nation] in *Ka's li Khamr* [A Cup for Wine] second edition (Beirut, Lebanon: Noblesse, 1991), 129.

109. Akl, *The Great Nation*, 129.

110. See Saïd Akl, in *As-Safir*, August 8, 2000.

111. Akl, *Cadmus*, 11 and 22.

112. Akl, *Lebnaan*, Vol. XI, number 512 (Friday, March 14, 1986), 1.

113. Akl, *Lebnaan*, Vol. XI, number 512 (Friday, March 14, 1986), 1.

114. See Constantin-François de Chasseboeuf, Comte de Volney, *Voyages en Egypte et en Syrie* (Paris: Volland et Dessenne, 1787). See also Jean Raymond's "Le Liban: Terre Traditionnelle de Liberté; Textes_Commentés, Tirés des Récits des Voyageurs Occidentaux du 16ème au 18ème Siècle," in *Cahiers de l'Oronte*, No. 7 (Beirut, 1969), 14.

115. *Cahiers de l'Oronte*, 16.

116. *Cahiers de l'Oronte*, 16.

117. Corm, *La montagne inspirée*, 53. According to Maronite national "mythology," this very idea was expressed by Saint-Louis, King of France, during the eleventh century, and in recognition of the Maronites' contributions to the

Crusades. For more on this, see Nasri Salhab's *La France et les Maronites* (Beirut, Lebanon: Dar el-Machreq, 1997).

118. Jean Raymond, "Le Liban: Terre Traditionnelle de Liberté; Textes Commentés, Tirés des Récits des Voyageurs Occidentaux du 16ème au 18ème Siècle," in *Cahiers de l'Oronte*, No. 7 (Beirut, 1969), 9.

119. *Cahiers de l'Oronte*, 9.

120. *Cahiers de l'Oronte*, 9.

121. *Cahiers de l'Oronte*, 11.

122. *Cahiers de l'Oronte*, 11.

123. *Cahiers de l'Oronte*, 12.

4



Saïd Akl: The Architect of the Spirit of the Nation

—Are you still afraid?
Yes.
—Afraid of dying?
No. Afraid of living!
Afraid of living in this world,
without dignity!

Alexandre Najjar, *Shame of the Survivor*

The title of this chapter is a reworking of that of Sélim Abou's 1984 book *Béchir Gemayel ou l'esprit d'un peuple*. In his work's introduction Abou claimed that his chosen title—Bashir Gemayel or the Spirit of a People—arose from the fact that he had at the time considered Gemayel to have been a great Lebanese patriot, animated and driven by a particularly ardent "passion for his country and his people." This qualified Gemayel, in Abou's opinion, for the honorific title of the "Spirit of the People."[1]

This chapter's title can also trace its inspiration to a 1979 talk delivered by the Lebanese dialectal poet, Georges Chaccour, entitled *Saïd Akl, Architect of the Spirit of His Nation*. Chaccour's lecture was based on an unpublished Honor Thesis written in partial fulfillment of his Bachelor's degree in French Literature at the Université St. Joseph in Beirut in the early 1970s. Although Chaccour's study is unavailable in print, its title's fame has acquired mythical notoriety in Lebanese nationalist circles, even though few are those who can claim to have actually read it. When this author solicited a copy of Chaccour's thesis, the latter dismissed it as

"very old and obsolete," unworthy of being read; instead, he produced a hand-written Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) abstract of the thesis.

Both Sélim Abou's and Georges Chaccour's protagonists, in both studies, are portrayed as the embodiment of the hopes, dreams, and memories of a muzzled—perhaps even a smothered and dying—Lebanese nation. Both Abou and Chaccour considered their respective heroes to be not mere mortal political actors, but rather inspirational national phenomena "revealing a nation to itself" and laying down the foundations of its eventual rebirth and renewal. Bashir Gemayel was murdered in 1982, and with his death were snuffed out the hopes of those who saw in him Lebanon's savior. Saïd Akl on the other hand, though fast approaching his one-hundredth birthday, is still at this writing very much the feisty and exuberant national poet. His youthful vigor and devotion to Lebanon and all things Lebanese are still a source of inspiration to many of his countrymen—most of whom are less than half his age. It is perhaps this, Akl's national energy, his dignified demeanor, and the gravitas of his years that entitle him to be the bearer of the title of "spirit of the nation." What's more, Saïd Akl himself was keen on being referred to—even self-styling himself—as "the spirit of the nation." "Lebanon is firmly rooted in my heart, and I know it by heart" he often mused. Furthermore, he claimed:

> The Lebanese people know Lebanon through me, and admire and love it through me, just as they esteem and value me through their own love and admiration for Lebanon. As their national poet, they expect me to verbalize their frustrations and articulate their emotions and their passion for their country. The Lebanese people are bruised and repressed today [. . .] I am their spokesperson, their advocate, their hope, and the voice that dares speak truth to power; the voice that will one day redeem them and restitute their national dignity.[2]

In troublesome times in the life of a nation, phenomena incarnating the collective will of a people, sometimes manifested in the figure of a single person, a "man of the hour" as it were, seem to be the only source of optimism for a nation on the brink of dissolution. Saïd Akl genuinely thinks of himself as that providential "man of the hour" who valiantly and without pretense or compunctions speaks for Lebanon. Many Lebanese think of him in those terms, as well. Therefore, it is perhaps fitting to title this chapter in words that Akl himself would have found apt and worthy of his role as "*Abu-Lebnaan*," the Father of Lebanon.

Dignity and spiritedness are very powerful personality traits—and indeed dearly valued and admired ones—in the super-virile ethos of the Lebanese mountains. And as we shall very soon discover, dignity, spiritedness—Leb. *'enfwaan*—encapsulate one of the most common expressions in the Aklian lexicon, and one of the predominant and most

cherished themes in Akl's written literary and political output. In fact, one can hardly come across an Aklian poem or newspaper article (regardless of their theme) that is not redolent with some hint of grandeur, grace, and nobility of spirit. Conversely language, similes, symbols, and metaphors that might be remotely related to notions of shame, pain, or despondency, are well nigh nonexistent in Akl's work. Indeed, it seems that dignity and spiritedness, and the serenity and joy that they engender, have been a constant source of inspiration for Akl, ever since his early dabbling with poetry in the late 1920s.

This sense of dignity and grace certainly populated Saïd Akl's patriotic odes, and that is perhaps normal, considering the epic nature of his themes, and in view of the unbounded pride and passion that Akl held for Lebanon and its people. However, the subject of grandeur and dignity is also especially apparent in poems that Saïd Akl wrote to women that he loved, and to the beloved that he lost. His, it seems, had always been a fulfilled, fulfilling, and blissful love, whether in his family relations, his love of country, or his romantic affections. "What can I do if I am not your run-of-the-mill poet who is afflicted with an achy heart?" he mused:

> Should I condemn God for having not plagued me with a bleeding-heart; the affliction of choice among poets in our region? [. . .] Should I reproach Him for not having sent me hurtful women and tormented, unfulfilled love? I was very lucky in my relationships in general, and in my relationships to women in particular. All the women to whom I had been drawn, were sublime "grandes-dames" who always loved me back and never caused me to suffer. . . . I never met a woman who saddened me or made me cry. Should I have invented a melancholy love just to conform to the "love poetry" of our region's poets?[3]

Indeed, all of the women with whom Saïd Akl was romantically involved, if only judging by his poems' heroines, were exalted "*grandes-dames*" (as he called them) of epic proportions, who inspired awe and admiration, rather than mere carnal attraction, or even grief and frustration. Certainly, in terms of their physiological features, Akl's women were no different from those celebrated by other poets of his generation.[4] But in terms of the nature of their relationships with the poet, as muses and sources of inspiration, then Akl's women were light-years removed from Leila al-'Amiryya of *Majnun Layla*[5] (Layla and the Madman), or Shakespeare's Juliet, or Chopin's George Sand, or Racine's *Andromaque*. From his Mary Magdalene of *Al-Majdaliyya*, to Europa of *Cadmus*, to Elissar the queen of Carthage, to Mary the mother of Jesus, Akl's women were an unbounded source of joy, nobility, serenity, and bravery, in addition to the physical beauty and blissful love that they inspired. And their beauty, even when sensuous and captivating, was immaculate and noble. This is perhaps

best encapsulated in Saïd Akl's 1961 work, *Yaara*, his first collection of Lebanese dialectal poems to be published in the Lebanese (Roman) script. Akl's beloved in *Yaara* was equated with God, on account of her divine beauty, of course, but also because she condensed physically and metaphorically the exquisite handiwork of God Himself—who was in turn induced, inspired, and assisted by Man in spawning His creation. In fact, we shall see that Man's rivalry and parity with God in the domain of creativity is a predominating theme of Akl's work; a motif which at once hallows the Creator and dignifies His creation, but which also challenges the Creator to always transcend His craft and handiwork. But going back to *Yaara*, the object of Akl's affection, his beloved, had always been a majestic awe-inspiring creature. In this vein, he wrote:

> Of course I love the others!/ But you?, with all the beauty teeming in your eyes,/ Even before you came into being, / I raised my quivering voice, in impassioned supplication to you./ And when,/ still drowsy and quivering,/ From having been a dream for far too long,/ You slipped out of a ruptured star,/ The handiwork of some god . . ./ And as you had yet no lilies for playmates,/ I plucked little bits of dawn/ and hues of ambrosia from your face,/ A face eclipsing the sun./ And out of your radiant eyelashes,/ which shook History from its slumbers,/ I pitched the world with flowers,/ so that if I were to ever lose you,/ I might still stumble back upon your dainty footsteps,/ buried inside some rose petal![6]

Even in Akl's epic poem *Cadmus*, which is titled after a mythical intrepid Phoenician male, the main protagonists were females; Europa, the sister of Cadmus, and Mira, her governess. What's more, instead of acquiescing in roles ordinarily ascribed to (Eastern) women of their Times, as delicate, loyal, demure, nurturing, and docile females patiently sitting in the shadow of their virile husbands, their brothers, or their fathers, both Europa and Mira were depicted as pugnacious and deliberate fighters. They were so, especially when it came to fighting for those peoples, ideas, and things that they cherished and held dear. The prized virtues which, for instance, Europa enshrined and incarnated (besides her enchanting physical beauty) were valor, integrity, tenacity, and nobility of spirit. In this, it was Europa (the nurturing female), not Cadmus (the super-virile male,) who personified the vigor, vitality, and dynamism—the *'enfwaan* spirit and spiritedness—of her nation.

According to Greek and Phoenician mythology, Europa was the daughter of Agenor, king of Tyre. She was also the sister of Cadmus the founder of Thebes and the Greeks' first teacher who brought them the Phoenician alphabet. But above all, Europa was the eponym of Europe, and in the Aklian Lebanonist imagination, she was the creator of Europe and the inspiration behind its virtues, its justice and its probity; bequests of a Leba-

nese princess, and values that uplifted and dignified the human spirit.[7] We learned in the preceding chapter that Europa had been spirited away by Zeus to the continent that eventually came to bear her name. We also learned that Agenor had sent Cadmus to fetch his sister and bring her back to Phoenicia. However, when Europa revealed to her brother her passion for her new adoptive land, and her determination to remain behind—and not return to Lebanon at his behest—she justified her decision by admitting "this [Europe to be] the homeland of my heart, and Lebanon the motherland that nursed and suckled me."[8] Cadmus scolded her for having evidently renounced her origins and betrayed her nurturer (the land of her birth).[9] But when accused of disloyalty to her ancestral homeland and her people, only an answer exuding grace and *'enfwaan* would have redeemed her. She then reportedly responded to Cadmus in one of Saïd Akl's most famous "Phoenician" universalist axioms, one that indicts chauvinistic national self-love and depicts the world of the Lebanese dispersion as Lebanon's homeland and playground, "Le Monde Libanais" as Akl referred to the Lebanese diaspora:[10]

> Have you [Cadmus] become this narrow,/ When my homeland's compassion can contain this entire universe,/ With all its living, and all its dead?!/ [. . .] I am my country, Cadmus,/ and Lebanon is a covenant!/ It is neither Cedars, nor mountains or gushing springs!/ My country is love!/ there isn't rancor in true love!/ It is light that doesn't mislead: it is diligence,/ And a hand that spawns beauty and wisdom./ Do not say "My Nation!" and overrun the universe,/ We are neighbors and kinfolk to all Mankind, Cadmus![11]

Thus, the abandonment of people and homeland becomes a national feature, a patriotic duty, and a moral national human obligation with Europa. Lebanon has a universal mission, she told us, to share its innate intellectual and cultural bounty with the whole of humanity, not to remain shackled in the narrow confines of egotistic national self-love. Therefore, the abandonment of kith and kiln was not a national disgrace, nor source of shame as implied by Cadmus, but, as Saïd Akl already reminded us in the preceding chapter, selflessness, diversity, and openness to the other were the very essence of Lebanon's national and cultural mission, "to Lebanonize the universe."[12]

It pained Europa a great deal to abandon the land that nurtured her, but it took valor, nobility, and poise to be able to detach herself from her past and her kinfolk in pursuit of her destiny, as a life-giver and a builder of civilization:

> I abandoned—O where is my mother's embrace!?/ I abandoned the unmatched spirit and friendship of my race;/ I abandoned my own father, his dignity and his grace;/ I left behind me the vigor of my brother Cadmus,

> the zest of youth;/ I left behind me emerald villages, sparkling with blue light,/ Perched in the neighborhood of clouds,/ Crossing into the Sun's playground,/ Pitching my homeland on the thresholds of heaven.[13]

What follows is what Europa's governess, Mira, had to say about her princess, and the inestimable role that Europa had selflessly (and instinctively) played in the edification of Europe—by inference, mankind's most sublime bequest to humanity:

> And it was you, Europa, who said:/ "Send me forth, from my homeland,/ First thing tomorrow at dawn,/ A message of love, bursting with affection and friendship,/ Across the universe!"/ [. . .] And soon they shall learn, how/ Upon our ships, we have born guidance and tranquility to the universe./ Therefore, what would you say,/ If we were to name this Western wilderness after you? Europa!/ [. . .] And would that be so pompous or strange?!/ After all, weren't we the first pioneers,/ To have ever plowed this universe for its bounty,/ And dreamt up glories, with eyes yearning for the stars?/ [. . .] Be then, O wasteland,/ A namesake for Europa,/ The land of good fortune,/ The land of reason,/ And the land of elegance and beauty!!/ [. . .] Then, as our arms shall knock on the gates of earth,/ Enchanting her with streams and blooming fields,/ [. . .] Our splendor as dauntless benevolent settlers,/ Aboard mankind's very first sailboats,/ Shall go on sailing in search of new horizons,/ Shall go on tossing land, in the embrace of land.[14]

This is par excellence what is referred to, in the Aklian lexicon, as *'enfwaan*! And as mentioned earlier, *'enfwaan* can translate roughly into the "Spirit," "Dignity," "Vigor," and "Grace" so dear to the Aklian poetics. However, the Arabic word *Unfuwaan* (and not necessarily its Lebanese equivalent *'enfwaan*) strictly refers to manliness, virility, or even the vigor of youth. But in the Aklian sense, the word refers not to the physical or morphological attributes of manliness, but rather to the more important psychological, spiritual, and temperamental ones. Thus, with Akl's *'enfwaan*, we are in the presence of such universal virtues as dignity in the face of hardship, grace in the face of grief, integrity in the face of disloyalty, spirit in the face of despair, verve in the face of indolence, and confidence and esteem (for oneself, and for others) in the face of disgrace and adversity. In the end, and through his literary alter egos, *'enfwaan* becomes indeed the physical, spiritual, and poetic sustenance of Saïd Akl, and one of the foundational principles of his Lebanonist doctrine.

Perhaps the pithiest way to illustrate the Aklian *'enfwaan* theme is a poetic quintet he wrote in 1991. Speaking to an anthropomorphic, emaciated, torn, and broken Lebanon, Akl attempted to inject dignity and vigor into its limp body and into the spirit of his despairing compatriots. He did so precisely by recalling *'enfwaan*:

> Bereft of dignity and muzzled they willed you!/ They even sullied your beauty and muddied your grace!/ Be furious, my country, or I shall die . . ./ You know, my very livelihood is your dignity;/ It is *'enfwaan*![15]

Even when Saïd Akl elegized his dead mother, to whom he was very deeply attached, he did so with dignified composure, singing her beauty and addressing her as if she were still alive, rather than lamenting her loss in lachrymose histrionics! There wasn't one tearful moment throughout his elegy. There wasn't one word betraying a sense of loss, or sorrow, or pain, even though on the whole the poem might have hinted to some feeling of yearning. Still, the serenity and joyful remembrances that it exuded were hardly characteristic of an elegy, and gave the reader the impression that the poet was addressing a living subject:

> Mother, O my angel,/ O my everlasting love,/ May your hands forever remain my cradle,/ And forever may I remain your child./ Another month dawns upon me,/ another Spring pushes on,/ O mother, you are the flowers,/ in whose fragrances I drown./ And when I utter the words "my mother",/ I am entranced and filled with bliss,/ As if shielded in a nightingale's wings. . . ./ Mother, O beatings of my heart,/ My cries when I ache,/ My kisses, and my love,/ When passion sets me ablaze./ Your eyes . . . what are your eyes?/ The most beautiful stars,/ sparkling in the skies./ Mother, O my angel,/ O my everlasting love.

There is an unmistakable sense of loftiness, joy and pride that celebrate the self-will and nobility of the human spirit here. A poem bemoaning a departed beloved is not traditionally a poem packed with such cheerful and optimistic expressions as "love," "kisses," "flowers," "spring," "nightingale," and "bliss." Yet, this is Saïd Akl's temperament and nature. He could not have pictured himself as a fifty-year-old orphan. He could not have imagined his mother lying lifeless in a casket before him. So he brought back joyful memories of childhood, cradled in his mother's embrace, drowned in her springtime fragrances, warmed by the sparkle of her eyes, protected and entranced by the tone and inflection of her voice, and by the enchantment invoked by the sound of her name.[16]

Whence has Akl drawn out this notion of "dignity," and how does it become the overriding theme of his literary works and political thought? These are some of the questions that this chapter will attempt to answer in the context of Saïd Akl's life and ideas. But first, we should perhaps briefly consider another emotive register in the poetry of Saïd Akl, the issue of "joy," because it relates very closely to the topic of dignity, and could perhaps explain the latter's hidden sources.

THE JOY OF BEING A CHRISTIAN

One of the main reproaches leveled at Saïd Akl by contemporary literary critics, is the fact that his intellectual output was completely bereft of heartache, frustration, grief, and despair. The common accusation was that Saïd Akl suffers from petrified or "hardened emotions," or that he is too "proud" or too "dignified" to let on an unbrave or an anti-*'enfwaan*ish sentiment.[17] The Lebanese poet Salah Labaki, a "Cadmusian comrade" of Akl's and perhaps even an early companion of his during both their stints in the Syrian Social Nationalist Party,[18] has argued that Saïd Akl's grace, and the absence of grief in his literature, stemmed from his deep Christian faith.[19] Akl's poetry is "the poetry of joy" claimed Salah Labaki,[20] and this joy perhaps drew its sources from the poet's Christian convictions. Indeed, in Labaki's view, "Christianity tolled its bells to herald joy; burned incense to spread joy; and wrote hymns to celebrate joy [. . .]. And therefore, if we are to confine the definition of poetry to a mere expression of sorrow, then we must admit that the poetry of Saïd Akl isn't poetry at all."[21]

One can deduce from the preceding that Saïd Akl is indeed a "happy poet," and that when he celebrates the prevailing theme of his work, *'enfwaan*, he is in fact exulting the serenity that one draws out of joy. Furthermore, this joy and dignity, appear to have stemmed from Akl's ontological certitude; from his profound conviction in the soundness and humanistic attributes of his Christian faith.[22] He argues that "for us Christians, Christ is God incarnate, and our knowledge and understanding of God come from Christ's own definition of Himself."[23] So, in Akl's view, since the purpose of religion is to define and explain God, the Christian definition of God would perforce become the most perfect, the most pure, the most exquisite, and the most accurate, because it was taken "from the horse's mouth" as it were, from the Divine fountainhead itself. This certitude, this unshakable conviction in the limitless kindness and compassion of God's, are a great source of boundless "pride" and "joy" for those who believe in this principle, according to Akl.[24] "Joy," because with this knowledge man is no longer ontologically helpless (for he now lives with proof and certitude that life is indeed eternal); and "pride," because man now feels privileged with this knowledge (of God) and with God's own benediction of man.[25] Therefore, in Akl's view, man's intimate knowledge and profound understanding of his Creator, empower him to elude despair, to remain confident in the face of adversity, and to be endowed with vigor, strength, creativity, and wisdom that are worthy of a god, and which, consequently, render man into a godlike creature.[26] "Because Man is, like God, a creator," says Akl,[27] "his aspiration must remain nothing short of becoming God and competing with Him."[28] One must keep in mind that Saïd Akl the political activist, that nationalist,

and the language reformer, remains ultimately a poet. Therefore, a serious exploration of his Lebanonist movement's tenets remains incomplete without attempting an excursion into his rich and bustling life. And I shall begin this account with a description of my own encounters with the poet during the early preparatory stages of this study. I realize that, at times, my narration might seem too lyrical for a study intended as a cultural history. In this, I must ask for the reader's patience; for, I believe that only by understanding Saïd Akl's poetics are we able to begin grasping his intellectual and political universe. And what better illustration of Saïd Akl's political thought than a description of my own impressions in preparations for, during, and subsequent to, my first encounters with the "architect of the spirit of the nation"?

SAÏD AKL, A FIRST ENCOUNTER

Saïd Akl welcomed me in his home with a firm handshake—a clamp one hardly expects from an octogenarian. His eyes beamed a cheerful "*ahla w sahla*" (Leb. Welcome), soon to spill into a warm smile and a resounding baritone: "*ahla w sahla, bienvenu, tfaddal!*"[29] I can still hear the soothing sounds of his warm reception: "Welcome, welcome, please come this way." And off I went to Saïd Akl's reading room, and into his mind.

My initial meeting with Akl was arranged in mere seconds, with a simple phone call to his house, without the slightest help of any intermediary, though Saïd Akl's stature—and Lebanon's intricate system of family networks and kinship connections—would have led one to believe that there had to be some sort of formal protocol to follow in order to arrange for such an encounter. Evidently (and in retrospect), no such formalities were required. Nevertheless, *wasta* is often a de rigueur regulator of human relations in Lebanon and throughout the Middle East. *Waasta*, which in the convoluted terminology of Lebanon's political and administrative culture roughly translates into mediation or arbitration, meant that in real terms no political or private business can ever be successfully conducted (at any level of society or state) according to normal, honest, preset business or political guidelines. Indeed, w*aasta* in Lebanon is clientelism pushed to the level of an estimable national art form. In Lebanon, regardless of how well-off one is, and regardless of how highly educated or how heavily decorated one is, one is only as good as his or her *waasta*. Anything and everything requires *waasta* in Lebanon. From getting a driver's license, to registering a birth, to issuing a death certificate, to proceeding with one's luggage through Customs at the Beirut International Airport. Indeed, entreaties, mediations, and the greasing of palms are a sine qua non of Lebanese political and social life. Consequently, not knowing beforehand

how accessible and how informal Saïd Akl were—and not knowing how loath he was to Lebanon's corrupt system of clientelism and institutionalized *waasta*—I had tried to enlist the help of Dolly Yammin, a niece of his, and daughter of his late brother Akl.[30] Unfortunately, a week had elapsed on my already brief stay in Lebanon, and no meeting had yet been arranged through Mrs. Yammin's good offices. In desperation, I picked up the phone and dialed that fated call to Akl's home as a shot in the dark, not knowing whether he would even be willing to speak with me. To my amazement (and delight), the receiver was picked up on the other side of the line only after (what had seemed like) three very short rings. Frankly, I would have preferred that the telephone had gone on ringing for another two or three minutes more, just long enough to have given me time to collect my thoughts and come up with something half-intelligent to say to "the poet of Lebanon." But there was no such luck for me. It was too late! Saïd Akl's arresting baritone had already begun pounding my right eardrum, and a reply had to be improvised, quickly! Fortunately, he was on his way out before he picked up the receiver (or so he said), which made our interchange laconic and left us very little time for small talk (and therefore, very little opportunity for me to make a fool out of myself). In fact, Saïd Akl seemed almost eager to end the conversation before it had even begun, and before I could attempt setting up a meeting with him. He asked if I could call him back the next day ("tomorrow" he said). I could have, of course! But in truth, I didn't want to miss that brief window of opportunity, since I already had him on the phone, and I was afraid that a similar encounter might not be afforded again "tomorrow." So I went straight for the kill:

"Can I meet with you sometime this week?"

"Sure, come tomorrow morning," he said tersely, as if already predecided on "tomorrow" even before having heard me out. He then hastened to begin the usual good-bye niceties. "Only my luck!" I said to myself. Of course I could not meet with him "tomorrow," because I had already made arrangements to spend the day at Université Saint Joseph's reading room. And after all, this was still the Middle East, and things were not supposed to be moving this efficiently and this quickly! Whatever happened to *waasta*? Furthermore, I wasn't prepared for my meeting with Akl to materialize this quickly! Especially after having gotten the impression that even his niece, Dolly Yammin, was unable to secure me an audience with him in almost a week. So, no, "tomorrow" was definitely out of the question for me. ("Now you're getting cocky!" I thought to myself.) So I asked Saïd Akl if he would be available to meet the following day; the day after "tomorrow," on Friday.

"How about two weeks from this coming Friday?" he said, "can you come in two weeks?" From cocky, I suddenly found myself veering to

Levantine sheepish and well-mannered, almost begging Saïd Akl to go back to his initial suggestion to meet "tomorrow."

"Oh, no Monsieur Akl, please! In two weeks I would be back home, in America," I said. "I really need to meet with you sooner, and I won't be able to st—" And I was cut short before I could even begin pleading my case. He sounded almost annoyed. After all, he was already on his way out when I telephoned, and I seem to have kept our conversation going for much longer than he had anticipated. He had already given me two date options, and I answered in the negative both times. Annoying, indeed! Still, he was gracious enough to "grant me a third wish," and briskly blurted out:

"Okay, come Sunday then! Do you want to come Sunday? Come Sunday; early in the morning; this way we can spend some time."

"Great, thank you, Sunday morning would be great, thank you so much Monsieur Akl," I must have repeated a dozen times. I was relieved that he wasn't annoyed. If he wanted to "spend some time," I kept telling myself, he couldn't be all that annoyed with me. So I'm still safe! I thought. I didn't want the subject of my research to be irritated with me this early on in the process, before having even met me.

"Sunday is excellent," I repeated gratefully. "Could you give me your exact address?"

"I am in Fern El-Shebbek, Aridi Street!" he said. "It's easy, you won't miss it; once you get to Aridi Street, ask anyone 'where is Saïd Akl's building?' they'll point you to it." By now, he sounded as if he was smiling at the opposite end of the line. In fact, I could have sworn he was even chuckling. He had a happy voice, almost self-satisfied, but not in a conceited way. As if sensing my silent puzzlement, he continued, "It's not really my building, you know! I don't own it! But everybody calls it 'Saïd Akl's building,' and the landlord doesn't seem to mind! So it caught on, and now everybody thinks I own it. *Tant pis* [Oh, well]! Anyway, it's much easier this way, especially for those visiting me for the first time. But you won't miss it, don't worry! You'll find it easily, even if you don't ask anyone. It's an eleven-story white building, and it's the only tall building on that street. I live on the fourth floor."

We said good-bye, and I began the countdown to my much anticipated Sunday, May 14, 2000, encounter with "the architect of the spirit of the nation."

SAÏD AKL, THE MAN

I arrived at Aridi Street quite early that morning, and I cased the neighborhood a few times before finally settling on a strategic parking spot,

nestled diagonally across from the mythical "Saïd Akl's building"; appropriately, in the shade of a young cedar tree! I would only have to cross the street toward my destination when 8 o'clock came. But for now, I would just sit tight and await the fated hour.

It was still early, barely 7:30, but Aridi Street was already bustling, with bakeries and coffee shops already teeming with early birds. The smell of fresh Turkish coffee and popping hot traditional Lebanese *zaatar* flatbreads mixed perfectly with the early morning breeze. The resulting aromas were tantalizing, but for some reason, I wasn't hungry, and coffee (I thought) would have made me even more fidgety than I already was. Suddenly, a strange sinking feeling overcame me as I began thinking about the Lebanese parliamentarian Raymond Eddé, who had just passed on a few days earlier in Paris. Then it dawned on me. Saïd Akl was perhaps rushing me on the telephone the day we spoke, because he was probably on his way to Ras-Beirut, where Raymond Eddé's remains were laying in state. And today, Sunday, the fourteenth, was Eddé's State funeral. So Akl was certainly going to miss our meeting to attend the funeral, I thought to myself. And so, as 8 o'clock drew nearer, my hopes of meeting with Saïd Akl grew fainter, and I began thinking that I'd be better off going back home and calling him at some point during the day in order to reschedule. He's definitely not going to miss his friend's funeral to keep my appointment, I kept telling myself.

Raymond Eddé, son of former Lebanese president Emile Eddé, was a towering national figure, a distinguished statesman, and a remarkable Lebanese nationalist. Like Saïd Akl, he was also a vocal and virulent opponent of the Syrian and Israeli occupations—and intrusions into Lebanese affairs during the last three decades of the twentieth century. He was also a strong proponent of restricting the armed Palestinian presence on Lebanese soil. Furthermore, Raymond Eddé was a committed secularist and an outspoken critic of traditional Lebanese Christian leaders, who in his view had been aiming for Lebanon's partition during the 1975 war. Ironically, Raymond Eddé was also the leader of Lebanon's oldest conservative nationalist party, the National Bloc, which was founded by his father Emile in 1934. In its early incarnations, under the leadership of the elder Eddé, the National Bloc was a defender of Lebanese sovereignty and a proponent of a "smaller Lebanon," with a distinct Christian character, and an identity separate from that of its Arab surroundings. Slowly, the National Bloc evolved into a nonsectarian "Lebanese" party under the leadership of Raymond and Pierre Eddé, although it maintained its strong partiality to Lebanese specificity and distinction from its Arab surroundings. Among the National Bloc's prominent members was the Lebanese jurist, historian (and sometimes parliamentarian) Jawad Boulos, who until his death in 1982, was a very close friend of Saïd Akl's, and

like Raymond Eddé himself, a fierce secularist and proponent of Lebanese particularism. As a result of his liberal views (which had become unpopular in a Lebanon divided along sectarian lines during the wars of the 1970s and 1980s), Raymond Eddé had to go into self-imposed exile in Paris; he left Lebanon after a failed 1976 attempt on his life in a Christian East-Beirut then bent on purging those Lebanese leaders who did not adhere to a purely Christian vision of Lebanon. He was never to return home during his lifetime.

Like Saïd Akl, Raymond Eddé fervently believed in the idea of a pluralistic, heteroclite Christian-Muslim Lebanese nationalism. In this, he was diametrically opposed to his father Emile who had the reputation of being a bombastic and intransigent proponent of a purely Christian-Lebanese state closely associated with France and the West, and clearly set apart from its Muslim Arab environment.[31] Indeed, Emile Eddé was among a minority of Maronites in Mandatory Lebanon, who saw (or at least admitted to) a sharp contradiction between "Christian" Lebanon and the new Lebanese state established by the French in 1920.[32] As a result, the elder Eddé became a vocal advocate of the truncation of the modern Lebanese Republic back to its pre-Mandate boundaries, in order to safeguard its purely Christian character.[33] Raymond on the other hand, akin to Saïd Akl, believed that the Muslim-Christian divisions in Lebanon were a myth concocted by opportunist mercantilistic Christian and Muslim elites bent only on safeguarding their positions of power and protecting their own economic interests. Therefore, Raymond Eddé labored all his life (even during his years in exile) for the establishment of a Lebanese political system governed by fair representation for all of the country's ethnic and religious constituents, in the spirit of dialogue, coexistence, and economic development. Unlike Akl, however, Raymond Eddé did not delve into issues of ethnicity, identity, or cultural narratives. Nor did he, as we shall see was Akl's *idée motrice*, attempt to transfer the idea of an integrative Lebanese identity from ethnicity to language, and place under its unifying umbrella the entire multiethnic, multireligious communal fabric of the modern Lebanese state. Furthermore, whereas Raymond Eddé might have advocated for a Christian-Muslim syncretism out of political necessity, Akl's heteroclite pluralistic multireligious Lebanonism stemmed from a geographical determinism that was one of the foundational pillars of his Lebanonist ideal.[34] Indeed, this idea of an integral natural Lebanon, romanticized by Saïd Akl, and accepted as an existential necessity by Raymond Eddé, was given intellectual bearings by both Akl's and Eddé's friend, Jawad Boulos.

Like Michel Chiha, Jawad Boulos was one of Lebanon's most eloquent artisans of the idea of the geographic rootedness of the Lebanese nation.[35] "Lebanon's incontestable geographical distinctiveness, which separates it

topographically and meteorologically from the contiguous [Arab] countries" was the dominant theme of Boulos' writings.[36] In his view Lebanon was, to be sure, distinct and non-Arab because of its religious, ethnic, geographic, and linguistic diversity, and in spite of its significant Muslim-Arabic linguistic elements. In fact, akin to his friend Saïd Akl, Jawad Boulos viewed linguistic diversity and Lebanon's ostensible use of the Arabic language as the outcome of diffusion, evolution, and conquest, not any putative Arabness or Arab ethnocultural kinship.[37] Boulos argued that is spite of the fact that the Lebanese "happen to write in Arabic today," the languages that they speak derive from Canaanite-Phoenician origins, and are tinged by a multiplicity of dialects that differ markedly from each other to the point of representing separate speech forms, distinct from Arabic.[38] This, along with the vaunted geographic-determinism argument (which discredited the national importance of MSA in Lebanon) provided Saïd Akl with intellectual fodder with which to fight Arabism's relentless attempts at taming Lebanon and conforming it to a homogenized Arabic identity.

There were certainly enough affinities between Raymond Eddé and Saïd Akl to justify (at least to my mind) the possibility of Akl's missing our appointment on that Sunday morning, May 14, 2000. Indeed, under normal circumstances Saïd Akl would certainly have been in attendance at Raymond Eddé's funeral. But as the poet's companion, friend, and business associate, Marie-Rose Amidi, was to reassure me later on that morning during my elevator ride to Akl's apartment:

> The Master [Saïd Akl] would never let himself mingle with this riff-raff of corrupt politicians. He has already paid his respects to the deceased and comforted his family this past Friday; the day Raymond [Eddé's] remains arrived from Paris, and long before the swarms of journalists, publicity-hungry opportunists, and latter-day friends who were in attendance for the cameras. He will certainly not attend this morning's spectacle. He's expecting you.

I was glad, and indeed felt fortunate that the meeting was still on (despite my apparent blunders leading up to it). In fact, when I inquired about why she had referred to her friend as "le Maître" (the Master), Ms. Amidi cautioned me against addressing Saïd Akl as "Monsieur" (as I had foolishly done during my initial telephone conversation with him a few days earlier). Indeed, up until my furtive elevator chat with Ms. Amidi, I had no idea how much Akl despised the honorific "Monsieur" (and I felt fortunate that my telephone conversation with him did not end up being more curt than it had already been, given my wrong choice of titles on that day). *Maître* or *M'allim* (teacher), I was told, was Saïd Akl's preferred form of address.

THE PHOENICIAN CIRCLE: CORM-RENAN-LAMMENS-AKL

Soon, I found myself in the *M'allim*'s living room, pacing anxiously between walls covered with courtly oil-portraits of Adèle and Chebl Akl. At first, I thought it was interesting that the paintings of Akl's parents were signed by the Lebanese academic and banker, Georges Corm, who had, in 1998, become a Minister of Finance in a Lebanese cabinet regarded by Saïd Akl as a lackey to the Syrian occupation authorities. I thought this was interesting because Georges Corm—that is, Georges-Antoine Corm—was a scion of the profoundly nationalistic Corm dynasty, and Akl must have somehow regarded him as a sellout and an instrument of Syrian influence in Lebanon. How would Saïd Akl then allow Corm's work to be displayed in his house? How would he feature portraits of his own parents—paragons of Lebanon-ness, in his view—painted by a "collaborator" as it were?[39]

But Saïd Akl was quick to interrupt my quiet speculation. As if my bewildered thoughts had been audible to him, he cautioned me that the Georges Corm on his walls, the author of his parents' portraits, was indeed the brother of his friend Charles Corm—that is Georges-David, *not* Georges-Antoine Corm. "This is not the work of today's young Georges Corm *le-m'awrib* [the Arabist]," Akl said with an audible sneer, pointing to the paintings on his living room walls.[40] In classic *Zehléwé* (Zahliote) audacity and candor, he quipped "our contemporary Georges Corm is a waste of time; he's nothing like his uncle Charles, or even his own father and namesake Georges-David, the painter of these canvases."[41]

The authority with which Saïd Akl spoke of the Corms betrayed the intimate bonds of friendship and intellectual affinity that must have tied him to them. He even sounded bitter (and entitled to be so) that a young descendent of this illustrious dynasty should turn out to be such a strange departure from his family's fervent patriotism and an apostate of the Phoenician "gospels" preached by his elders. Indeed, both Charles and Georges Corm were such "*grands Libanais*" (noble Lebanese patriots) in Akl's eyes that they became among the first recipients of his prestigious Prix Saïd Akl, awarded respectively to Charles and Georges in 1962 and 1967.[42] It should be noted that Saïd Akl established this yearly literary award back in 1962 "pour récompenser les sérviteurs de la patrie [to reward the defenders of the nation]."[43] Its early laureates were on the whole "Phoenicianist" associates; intellectual cohorts, and personal friends of the poet, who had made notable literary, cultural, or political contributions to the grandeur of Lebanon.[44] The list of laureates, besides the Corms, included such Lebanese nationalists as Hektor Klat, Fouad

Ephrem-Boustany, Jawad Boulos, Maurice Shéhab, Edouard Saouma, Fouad Gabriel Nafah, Joseph Matar, Antoine Berberi, and Salah Stétié.[45]

When the term "dynasty" was used above in reference to the Corm family, it was not meant loosely. For, the Corms were a truly dyed-in-the-wool intellectual and artistic dynasty, and an authority in the canon of Lebanese nationalism. Their social and artistic salons, and their cultural influence, held sway not only within their immediate familial and kindred intellectual milieu; they extended to different Lebanese social strata and disparate regions, and dominated various local literary and creative mediums. Indeed, Saïd Akl himself seems to have been one such outcome and devotee of the Corms's "national school," as were many of the Corms's own contemporaries, and other more modern literati and artists of Saïd Akl's generation.

The Corms's patriarch was Charles Corm's own grandfather, Sham'un (or Simon) al-Shidyaaq, whose real surname might have been probably Hkayyim. Sham'un al-Shidyaaq (or Simon the Clerk) was a young cousin of Emir Bashir Shehab's court priest in Bteddin (Beit el-Din).[46] This Sham'un, according to his famous grandson Charles, was the child genius of his time; a rare talented polymath and gifted polyglot. On account of his talent, the Emir Bashir reportedly enlisted Sham'un's services as a foreign-language instructor to his two young sons. Charles Corm relates that the young princes, many years Sham'un's seniors, were often defiant and contemptuous of their adolescent teacher, who one day reportedly lost patience with the eldest and ended up slapping him in the face. When confronted by the Emir, and when censured for having slapped the heir to the throne, Sham'un was reported to have told the Prince that if faced with a similar situation he would not hesitate striking the recalcitrant pupil again; Sham'un refused to betray the responsibilities entrusted him by Prince Bashir "to tutor and educate the Emir's children, so that they may, one day, become worthy of inheriting their father's mantle."[47] The Emir Bashir, reportedly impressed by Sham'un's audacity and rectitude, shot back: "by God, you are truly one valiant and spirited steed!" He also rewarded the young tutor with a hefty purse of gold coins and an eighteen-year appointment as court clerk and instructor.[48] From that day on, the nickname "spirited steed"—which translates into the Lebanese "Qorm" (with the initial "Q" pronounced as a glottal-stop or a soft "K" in Lebanon's vernacular)—stuck to young Sham'un and ended up replacing his surname, Hkayyim, and his court title, al-Shidyaaq.[49] Many years later, Sham'un Corm would wed Marie Hani, the maid of honor of Prince Bashir's second wife, begetting three sons, among them David Corm, Charles and Georges Corm's father, born in 1852.

David Corm himself, like his own father (and later his sons Charles and Georges) was a child prodigy in his own right, and a talented artist. Fam-

ily legends have it that the stones, rocks, and trees of the backwoods and vineyards of his mother's native Ghazir served as the principal canvas for young David's early paintings, sculptures, and artistic creations.[50] In 1862, at the tender age of ten, David Corm was discovered by the Jesuit friars of his neighborhood, and was enlisted to teach painting at Ghazir's Jesuit College, the forerunner of the Beirut Université Saint-Joseph and where the young Belgian Jesuit Henri Lammens had incidentally completed his novitiate—before moving to Beirut and subsequently becoming Charles Corm's mentor and professor at USJ. In Ghazir also, in 1861, and in the neighborhood of that same Jesuit College where David Corm became an art teacher and where Henri Lammens got the rudiments of his training as philologist and historian, Ernest Renan had seemingly found the perfect retreat where the early manuscripts of his monumental *La Vie de Jésus* began taking shape. In 1861, Renan was also in the early stages of his *Mission de Phénicie* excavations; he was sharing the same living quarters, a stone's throw away from the Jesuit College, with his sister and personal assistant Henriette, and E. Lockroy, the cataloguer and lithographer of some of the *Mission*'s seventy drawings, maps, illustrations, and engravings.[51] Maurice Barrès who relayed accounts of Renan's stay in Lebanon in his *Une enquête aux pays du Levant*, relied to some extent on the remembrances of the son of one of Renan's companions, Henri Gaillardot. According to Barrès, Gaillardot, who had accompanied the French philologist on his "mission through Phoenicia," noted that E. Lockroy roamed quite extensively the village of Ghazir and had apparently also befriended many of the village's residents.[52] "Ah, that charming Lockroy" mused Gaillardot:

> He enchanted the entire village with his enthusiasm. He was the one responsible for the stage effects at the Jesuit College's production of the "Saint Agapitus' Tragedy." It should be noted that the Jesuit College at that time was still in Ghazir; the Jesuits had not yet moved to Beirut. Indeed, they only transferred to Beirut when they saw that the Americans were establishing their own institution of high learning there. You must know their predilection for school plays. Renan, in a frock coat, came to watch their play. [. . .] All the stage effects were Lockroy's work, if I remember well! [. . .] Oh yes! Renan fostered good relations with the Jesuits [. . .] and he made use of their knowledge of archeology.[53]

Clearly, there are no explicit accounts of possible encounters between Ernest Renan and the young David Corm, nor even between the latter and Renan's talented engraver. But it is not far-fetched that such encounters might have taken place. It seems feasible that just as Jesuit friars were able to stumble upon the young talent of David Corm, so could have Lockroy the drifting troubadour who spent a good portion of his stay in Ghazir

roaming David Corm's haunts, Henri Lammens's classrooms, the villages' quaint streets, its terraced orchards and its Jesuit rectory. Many decades following Renan's *Mission de Phénicie*, the fondness and special affection and reverence that Lebanese nationalist intellectuals from Charles Corm's circle—for example, Michel Chiha, Saïd Akl, Fouad Ephrem-Boustany, Henri Lammens, and many others—held for Ernest Renan bear witness to a possible personal encounter and an ensuing fascination. Incidentally, one of the chief reading rooms in Beirut's Jesuit university today—the USJ—is named after Ernest Renan.

The significance of this possible encounter between Charles Corm's father and Ernest Renan's inner circle, spurious as it might have been, is not only in the fact that Lockroy might have nourished David Corm's talent. The significance is in the fact that Ghazir's Jesuits, and their own encounter with Renan and his *Mission de Phénicie*, might have fueled their own cultural and intellectual bias. This partiality to all things Phoenician might have, in turn, chiseled young David's spirit, and through him, that of his own children, Charles and Georges (and a few years later, even that of an adolescent Henri Lammens, who was also schooled at the same Ghazir Jesuit College, ca. 1877, and who would go on to become a teacher and mentor to generations of Lebanese nationalists, including Charles Corm, Michel Chiha, Saïd Akl, and their cohorts).

In later years, David Corm would become a teacher of world-renowned Lebanese artists such as Khalil Gibran, César Gemayel, and Habib Srour, in addition to his own children, Charles, Georges, Jean, and Marie, and many other cohorts from the intellectual and social circles that they frequented, and in which Saïd Akl was a young apprentice. It should be noted that Saïd Akl's early French Language poetry broke into print in one of Charles Corm's many literary enterprises; the short-lived but mythical periodical *Phénicia*.[54] In this monthly journal, dedicated to the dissemination of Lebanon's Phoenician themes through the literary output of young Lebanese literati, a twenty-six-year-old Akl figured prominently among such illustrious elders as Michel Chiha, Hector Klat, Maurice Hajje, Elie Tyan, and Charles Corm.

Today, Charles Corm's own children are still keeping with the family tradition and watching over their father's Phoenicianist legacy. David Corm Junior, Charles's eldest son is a Beirut-based architect; his second son Hiram is a civil engineer employed by David's firm; his daughter Madeleine is an interior designer; and his youngest daughter Virginie is a graphic designer. "We are in a position," says David Corm Junior, "to put into practice our father's vision in taking the best from the past and using it to reinstate our culture in the modern age."[55] The legacy lives on also, in the friendship and creative and intellectual affinities that Charles Corm and his brother Georges found in a young Saïd Akl. After all, it is not any

run-of-the-mill artist that Saïd Akl would have given the privilege of rendering portraits of Chebl and Adèle. The Geroges Corm displayed in Saïd Akl's home was not only the brother of Charles Corm. He was, perhaps more significantly, the son of David Corm, the patriarch of a national "dynasty" and a teacher and mentor to Lebanese artists such as Khalil Gibran, César Gemayel, Habib Srour, and many others. Most significantly also, David Corm crossed paths with some of the most notable catalysts of the modern Lebanese national idea—namely figures like Henri Lammens and Ernest Renan—and his workshops and salons provided the first launching pads to the first group of "Young Phoenicians," in which the young Saïd Akl was a rising star during the late 1930s.

It should be noted that one of David Corm's pupils, César Gemayel, was a native of Bickfayya, the ancestral home of Saïd Akl's mother, and a mountainous village not too far from the poet Salah Labaki's home in Baabdat. As mentioned earlier, Salah Labaki was one of Saïd Akl's great admirers, a close friend of Antun Saadé's, and an active member of the latter's Syrian Social Nationalist Party. Indeed, Labaki, who was born in 1906 in Sao-Paolo Brazil, where his father Na'um was editor and publisher of two major Arabic-language newspapers, had been a childhood friend of Antun Saadé (born in 1904, and whose own father was also a journalist in Sao-Paolo). Both the Saadés and the Labakis, as well as the Gemayels and the Yazbecks, hailed from the same Matn district of Mount Lebanon. In fact, Bickfayya, home to both the Gemayels and Saïd Akl's maternal family, is nestled between Dhour el-Choueir (Antun Saadé's native village), and Baabdat (Salah Labaki's ancestral home). A mere two miles separate each of Dhour el-Choueir and Baabdat from Bickfayya. This geographical proximity perhaps accounted for some of the rivalry that divided Bickfayya, Dhour el-Choueir, and their respective residents. After all, both towns were the birthplaces of the founders of two of Lebanon's largest ultra-nationalist political parties, the SSNP, and the Phalanges. Besides these two parties' ideological divergences (the former being a "Greater-Syrian" nationalist movement, and the latter a "Greater-Lebanese" one), Dhour el-Choueir was a largely Greek-Orthodox town, while Bickfayya was almost exclusively Maronite. But it is quite possible that the rivalry between the two parties stemmed largely from regional and geographical pride than from communal chauvinism. Regardless, it remains that the intellectual fountainhead from which both the SSNP and the Phalanges drew their "national" principles was essentially the same. Both were fundamentally "Lebanese" nationalist, both sought to ward the specter Arab nationalism off of Lebanon, and both relied on pre-Arab (and often anti-Arab) references and symbolism to define the Lebanese and the Syrian nations. Only after the death of Antun Saadé in 1949 did the SSNP begin moving away from its founder's philosophy, and began

developing "Arab nationalist" proclivities. As a result, the SSNP-Phalangist rivalry became more clearly a political one during the 1950s and 1960s, assuming a more violent facet during the 1975 Lebanese Civil War. Consequently, a whole new culture of discord between Bickfayya and Dhour el-Choueir began setting in.

Salah Labaki's family returned to Lebanon in 1908, at which time Antun Saadé was still attending a boarding school in Broummana, a town adjacent to Salah Labaki's ancestral Baabdat. During the mid-1930s, Salah Labaki, by then a member of the SSNP, served as the personal assistant to Antun Saadé, and would remain in that position until 1937.[56] It was during Labaki's stint as an SSNP member that Saïd Akl is believed to have flirted with the party's ideals, revealing some affinity to its early Phoenicianist proclivities and a strong admiration for its leader's charismatic personality. Indeed, if judging by the date of Akl's Forward and Introduction to his epic-poem *Cadmus*, in 1937, the claim to his membership in the SSNP as purported by Antun Saadé himself, furtive and superficial as it might have been, can be lent some credence.[57] This possible SSNP connection, of course, had to remain in the realm of circumstantial evidence. Nevertheless, there exists a sounder confirmation, besides "human-networking," that may tie Saïd Akl to known members of the SSNP, and which could point to the possibility of his association with that party.

Saïd Akl's Introduction to *Cadmus* (dated in 1937) extolled the city of Damascus as one of the principal Phoenician metropolises and a radiant beacon of enlightenment and knowledge.[58] *Cadmus* was first published in 1944—although it is believed to have been completed at a much earlier date; possibly around 1937. But, up until 1961, the date at which the second printing of the book had left the presses, the famous Introduction to *Cadmus*, which was perhaps as culturally and politically significant as the body of the text itself, still found its way, in a modified version, into the second edition—despite its somewhat damning celebration of Syria. Mysteriously however, this famed Introduction disappeared altogether from all subsequent printings of *Cadmus*—which coincided with the period during which Lebanon had fallen under Syrian domination. When asked about this curious modification of an invaluable piece of literature and cultural history, Saïd Akl curtly replied that "its time had elapsed."[59] Whatever that meant, it was evident that Saïd Akl was attempting to hide an association of which he was no longer overly (and overtly) proud. But Saïd Akl was not alone in his attempts to disengage from Antun Saadé and the SSNP's political activities of the 1930s and 1950s. Salah Labaki himself was also beginning to chart a different course, away from the SSNP, by 1940. In fact, Labaki had joined Emile Eddé's National Bloc upon quitting the SSNP in 1940, and subsequently applied for membership in Pierre Gemayel's Phalange Party.[60] Pierre Gemayel admits to

having kept Labaki's letter of application as a token of gratitude, even as he declined granting him formal membership in the party, preferring to maintain him as a personal friend and a party enthusiast rather than an official card-carrying member.[61] Labaki would thus remain an active member of the National Bloc until his death in 1955.

It should be noted that at the time of both Salah Labaki and Saïd Akl's flirtations with the SSNP, the principles of Syrian Social Nationalism were clearly reminiscent of the sort of Lebanese patriotism and "Lebanonism" prevalent in Lebanon throughout the 1920s and 1930s. Saadé's "Syrian Nationalism" then, not unlike Lebanonism today, was a form of local patriotism that celebrated Lebanese distinctness and refused any allusion to a putative Arabness. Indeed, if Antun Saadé were alive today, it is doubtful that he would have recognized in his SSNP successors the "Syrians" that he had conceived of back in 1932, the time during which he had begun putting together the principles of Syrian Nationalism. Under Saadé, Syrian Nationalism, heavily imbued in the ideas of Jesuit scholar Henri Lammens, argued that there existed a specific and independent Syrian nation predating by many thousands of years Islam, the Arab conquest, and the Arab nation. Though acquiescing (as a matter of common sense) in a minor Arabic component in the "Syrian identity" (strictly limited to the use of MSA), Antun Saadé still utterly denied the Arabness of his Syrians, rather viewing them as an integral part of the Mediterranean world; culturally, geographically, linguistically, and ethnically separate from the Arab hinterland. This view, common among Lebanese nationalists of all stripes, popularized by the Phoenicianists in the 1920s and 1930s, and invigorated by Saïd Akl's Lebanonism today, was evidenced by a speech delivered by Antun Saadé in 1939. In it, Saadé argued that:

> In the [Syrian Social National Party] we have completely done away with the myth that we are easterners and that our destiny is linked to that of the eastern peoples. We, the Syrians, are not easterners. On the contrary, we are the fountainhead of Mediterranean culture and the custodians of the civilization of that sea which we transformed into a Syrian sea whose roads were traversed by our ships and to whose distant shores we carried our culture, our inventions and our discoveries.[62]

In this passage Saadé appeared to have simply replaced Akl and Corm's Lebanese and Phoenicians by the Syrians. But as mentioned earlier, this was a common pleonasm, prevalent in the first half of the twentieth century, and the appellation "Syria" back then was a relic of Western geographers, used primarily in reference to an amorphous geographical entity unrelated to today's "political" (Arab) Syria. What is important to remember, however, is that Syrian Nationalism as elaborated by Saadé, had the aim of differentiating between the Syrian and the Arab peoples,

and advocating for Syrian specificity and Syrian distinction away from a rising Arab nationalism imperiling Syrian nationhood and threatening to sweep Syria in its wake.

Charles Corm had already, in the late 1920s, begun elaborating on a conception similar to that of Saadé's, depicting the Phoenicians—Saadé's non-Arab Syrians—as benevolent conquerors, at the origin of every human accomplishment of note. Below are excerpts of Charles Corm's introduction of his address before the *Congrès de L'Humanisme*, delivered in Monaco in 1935. In it Corm appeared to unequivocally enunciate doctrinal convictions tightly twined to elements of Saadé's 1939 speech (with a slight semantic alteration replacing "Syrians" by "Phoenicians"):

> From the remotest antiquity, when they were still known by the names of Canaanites, and then Phoenicians, the Lebanese have created, conserved, defended, affirmed, and developed an expansive and liberal civilization with universal tendencies, so accessible to other peoples, to the point that some from among those, including some of the greatest [civilizations], assimilated [this Lebanese culture] to the point of coming to identify it with their own genius.[63]

This intellectual universality and cross-fertilization between Phoenicianists and Syrianists—which was evidently Henri Lammens's contribution to canon of "Lebanese nationalism"—might have seduced a romantic Saïd Akl into a brief flirtation with the SSNP. Indeed, Akl might have even become the very intellectual inspiration behind Antun Saadé's 1939 speech, as evidenced by the spirit of Akl's 1937 Introduction to *Cadmus*, already cited in the preceding chapter. In that famed introduction, Akl argued that Lebanon—and note the progressive semantic transformation, from Phoenician, to Syrian, culminating in Lebanese—was the architect and custodian of European values (which, in Akl's estimation, were the modern incarnation of Man's most sublime value system).[64] According to this view, Lebanon was also an originator of a six-thousand-year tradition of pacifism, tolerance, humanism, and intellectual excellence which entitled it to become a "fatherland" and a limitless fountainhead for Truth.[65] But, given the SSNP's Arabist affectations beginning in the 1960s, Saïd Akl has hardly spoken of his presumed association with the party and its leader. However, it is not far-fetched to suspect that the Akls, the Saadés, and the Corms might have drunk from the same intellectual wellspring during the first half of the twentieth century, and that Saïd Akl might have intersected Syrian Nationalists just as he had certainly frequented Phoenicianists. After all, the friendship that bound him to Salah Labaki was at least as close as the one that connected him to the Corms. In this sense, Salah Labaki, and perhaps even Antun Saadé himself, were Lebanonists as much as they had been Syrianists. The fact that Salah Labaki

would become a lifelong member of Raymond Eddé's national bloc cannot be overstated.

In the early 1940s,[66] Salah Labaki published a collection of seven "national fables" titled *From the Depths of the Mountain*, a work intended as a "rekindling of the Lebanese national memory" through the musings, portrayals, and interpretations of a poet.[67] The work was an admixture of patriotic odes harking back to Phoenician and Biblical references, and popular lore, mythology, and legends drawn from Lebanon's Phoenician, pre-Islamic, and pre-Arab past. In a sense, *From the Depths of the Mountain* was closer to a collection of national missives, ritual celebrations, and devotional ceremonies dedicated to the land and the people of Lebanon. Its significance, especially its second edition (published in 1961, some six years after Labaki's death), was in the fact that it was adorned with six engravings authored by the painter César Gemayel, Pierre Gemayel's cousin, David Corm's disciple and pupil, and a celebrated colleague of Charles Corm, Georges Corm, and Saïd Akl, yet another evidence of the intellectual, cultural, and artistic affinities that linked Akl to members of this Phoenician-Lebanonist circle.

THE SON OF ZAHLÉ

The town of Zahlé, the administrative and economic capital of Lebanon's Bekaa Valley, lies in a lush ravine straddling the snowcapped eastern escarpments of Mount Lebanon and the sprawling anti-Lebanon plateau. The nectar of its celebrated ancient terraced vineyards, cooled by the rumbling white waters of the Berdawni River, once filled the cellars of Rome and the chalices of the nearby temples of Baal, Jupiter, and Bacchus with what the wine stewards of Louis XIV vaunted as "les vins d'or du Liban" (or Lebanon's golden wines). Today, Zahlé is Lebanon's prime vineyard, producing remarkable clarets-like vintages in addition to a local national *aqua vitae*, the prized Lebanese arak. Indeed, at a stone's throw from Saïd Akl's ancestral home in Zahlé, lies the celebrated "valley of the vineyards" (or *Wadi al-'Arayesh*). This lush lowland was a favored childhood playground of young Saïd's, where he used to tirelessly run, for hours on end, along the racing stream of the river that bisected his town and irrigated its old vines and orchards.

In the distance to the northeast of Zahlé, and under the watchful shade of the anti-Lebanon mountain range, the impavid ageless columns of Baalbeck (Canaanite *Baal-Beka*, or the Lord of the Fields[68]) stood sentry over what Zahliotes proudly dubbed "the bride of the Bekaa." Indeed, Zahlé's prestige among the various cities of the Lebanese interior was in many ways reminiscent of the very attributes used by some to describe

Lebanon itself: a crossroads, a way-station, a commercial center, and a tapestry of cultures, religions, and ideas.[69] Similarly, just as Lebanon's position in the Middle East was viewed as "a Christian islet in a Muslim sea,"[70] so was Zahlé within Lebanon's Muslim hinterland a singular, fearless, Christian stronghold.[71] In fact, since very remote antiquity, Zahlé was considered an important landmark and a shrine along the classic invasion route that went through Lebanon, and which witnessed such conquerors as Nebuchadnezzar, Alexander the Great, Ptolemy, Agrippa, Antiochus III, the Omayyads, and a myriad others who had to ride through the city during their campaigns East and West of the Lebanon Mountains. Today, the ancient scars on Zahlé's natural landscape, and the arcane monolithic, Phoenician, Roman, Maronite, and Omayyad monuments sprinkled about its countryside bear witness to its checkered past. Local tradition has it that even the seventh-century Patriarch St. John Maron, founder of the Maronite "nation," had sought refuge in one of Zahlé's numerous caverns.[72] Even the etymology of its name, which in Anis Freyha's reference work recalls the Aramaic *Zehal*, denotes movement, rolling on, flowing, traveling, or sliding.[73] Therefore, whether referring to tectonic geological features, to natural fluvial channels, or even to the transits of peoples, armies, refugees, and merchandise that must have moved through Zahlé throughout antiquity (as they do in modern times), the name still befits the town's reputation.

Besides its imposing geographical isolation, forlorn on the harsh eastern slopes of Mount Lebanon, Zahlé's distinction in Lebanese popular culture is due also to the purported tenacity and chivalry of its people. Indeed, local legends depict Zahlé as the "fatherland of lions" (*Zahlé marba l-'suudi*), where locals would die fighting in defiance rather than dwell on an injury or injustice.[74] This primal proclivity has earned Zahliotes the reputation of firm untamed highlanders who trounce and spurn invaders, but who are, nevertheless, peaceful and hospitable to those who seek them out in friendship. Indeed, Saïd Akl would condense that rugged local vigor (and would transform it into a common Lebanese quality) in a 1974 poem entitled *My Home Is a Boulder*. In this ode to Lebanon, Akl scrutinizes, then cautions, his would-be invader:

> Where are you from, you who is uplifted atop tree branches?/ Where are you from, you to whom cypresses and cedars self-immolate?/ If you're not one of us, you have better not come near./ But if you're here in peace, know that our mountains are hospice to those who seek us out for protection!/ And who am I, you ask?/ Do not ask! I'm a dusky maiden,/ True to these crossroads of suns and seashores!/ My home is a boulder, dangling from a star,/ Celebrated in Scriptures, christened "Lebanon"!/ The worries of glory have torn into her soul, for, she is Desire!/ But beware! as the eagles' nests breed and nurture eagles!/. . .

> My countrymen seethe, and death becomes their game,/ Should inequity dare glance at our foothill . . ./ To them, a handful of soil and the scent of cedar are abundance,/ Their vigor is their strength, should land become meager./ But, is God's paradise anywhere else but where one's eyes feel sated and content?/ After this, all expanses are wasteland! /[. . .] We were, and shall remain evermore, because we are its true believers./ And thereafter, let your heroes measure up to our battlefields![75]

Even in times of peace, Zahliotes have come to condense all that which is courage, manliness, and integrity in the Lebanese national consciousness. Indeed, the Lebanese relative adjective *Zehléwé* (Zahliote,) which is ordinarily used in reference to a native of Zahlé, has also come to denote anyone prone to exhibit an imposing temperament usually attributable to someone from Zahlé, someone exuding courage, integrity, and temerity. A *Zehléwé* is therefore someone who does not cower before adversity; who does not flinch, even if the adversary is clearly superior, and who acts and speaks with aplomb, often in an intimidating tone, and often using straight, bold, and even raw language if need be. This is the Zahlé that saw Saïd Akl's birth! A Zahlé that condensed and radiated the *'enfwaan* and bravery of its native knights, poets, and farmers.

It was in this Zahlé, "the fatherland of lions," that Saïd Akl was born on July 4, 1912. At the time his family lived in the same Akl ancestral home that Saïd's father Chebl—Lebanese for "lion cub"—had inherited from his own father, Akl. In the tradition of rustic Lebanese Mountain structures, the home was a plain giant cube of chiseled white stone walls, connected through a series of wide arched windows, crowned by a quadrangular pyramid of traditional Mediterranean red terra-cotta tiles. Unassuming and modest, the Akl house was almost identical to the neighborhood's other clusters of red-tile-roofed structures save the extensive terraced gardens and the wild vines in which it was doused. In fact, were it not for Saïd Akl's own father's notoriety as a local *'abadaay* (or tough guy), a prize-man of valor and a generous landowner, the home would have passed as insipid and as ordinary as the other tens of similar structures in Zahlé's Mar-Elias district. Instead, and although it went vacant after Adèle's death, today Saïd Akl's house in Zahlé, like "his" building in Beirut, has become a local landmark and a prime destination for visitors and locals alike. Although it owes some of its modern notoriety to him, Saïd Akl claims that it was mainly his own father's spirit that had molded the house's character and earned it its reputation.[76]

Today, the white stone walls of this abandoned home, with its decaying roof and its dilapidated green wooden shutters, are almost entirely overrun by wild vines advancing from the overgrown gardens skulking around it. But its mythical reputation still eclipsed its decrepit appearance! Saïd Akl asserted that this reputation was due mainly to the ghost of

his father and his celebrated generosity. He claimed that as a child barely four or five years old, his punctilious and imposing father would often demand that the young Saïd participate in the family's weekly distribution of alms. This, according to Akl, had become a family ritual that was instigated by the locusts that had ravaged Mount Lebanon during World War I (and the famine and misery that that war had wrought in its path).[77] Thus, according to Akl, the family's Saturdays were often spent on the front patio of their home, where young Saïd, his parents, his teenaged brother Akl, and his sisters Emilie and Haifa, would spend hours on end distributing flour, bread, rice, and money to hundreds of Zahlé's neediest. Akl claimed that the human chains leading up to his house on those Saturdays, extended for hundreds of meters, and that he, his siblings, their parents, and the house help were all expected to donate their Saturday to tend to Zahlé's needy. "Generosity is like steel," often repeated Chebl to his young Saïd; "if it doesn't get rubbed and polished every so often, it tends to rust out and lose its brilliancy."[78]

Needless to say, Chebl Akl's philanthropy[79] almost ruined his family. By the time young Saïd was old enough for college, his father had already lost everything they owned, savings, family heirlooms, lands, and even the Mar-Elias house that had been in the Akl family for generations. This, in addition to a chronic childhood illness, forced Saïd Akl, who had been a student at Zahlé's Marist Institut Oriental, to be home-schooled for many years under the vigilance and supervision of his mother, Adèle Yazbeck, a woman of stunning beauty and high culture. She was the daughter of a landowning notable from Bickfayya, Habib Yazbeck. At a time when female literacy was not a cultural norm in nineteenth-century Lebanon, Adèle Yazbeck was multilingual and hailed from a society that had held learning and the pursuit of knowledge in the highest esteem.[80] It was from Adèle that young Saïd would come to inherit his hunger for learning, and it was at her hands that he came to savor his first samplings of French, English, and Arabic poetry.[81] The many long days that he had spent confined to his bed were rendered more bearable by the soothing sound of Adèle's voice, which chased dullness and pain from his young life by way of lengthy readings from Lebanon's history and literary canon. Indeed, Saïd Akl boasts having learned to love Lebanon and its history through the timber of his mother's voice and from the sparkle of her eyes.

It was in this atmosphere of bucolic simplicity, in a village that exuded chivalry and pride, in a happy and guarded childhood nurtured in a warm homestead and under the watchful eyes of a loving mother and a generous and taciturn father, that Saïd Akl's character was molded. Indeed, if judging only by the effect of Georges Corm's paintings in Akl's Beirut apartment, the poet was clearly "*ibn immo w bayyo*" (the true son of his own mother and father, as the Lebanese adage went), and the product

of his rugged mountain sanctuary. The audacity and defiance in Chebl Akl's piercing blue eyes were intimidating even on canvass. However, the unsettling sensation suffusing Chebl's section of the wall was tempered and tamed by the poise and serenity that emanated from Adèle's own portrait. It was Saïd Akl's mother that had imparted grace, wisdom, and appreciation of beauty and learning to him. From his father, on the other hand, Saïd Akl inherited his untamed spiritedness, his generosity, and his national *'enfwaan*.

FROM ZAHLÉ TO BEIRUT

In 1930, with barely his Baccalauréat in hand, Saïd Akl left the guarded atmosphere of his ancestral Zahlé for the turbulent winds of Beirut.[82] His intention was to enroll at the École Supérieure des Ingénieurs de Beyrouth (ESIB); Lebanon's young equivalent of France's prestigious École Polytechnique, and the country's premier college of engineering at the time. His dream had always been to become an engineer. But the financial hardships that had befallen his father during the WWI years had made it impossible for the family to shoulder ESIB's costly tuition. Young Saïd's hopes of becoming an engineer would thus be dashed against the reality of his family's financial difficulties.

Frustrated by his inability to fulfill his dream of contributing to Lebanon's reconstruction, the destruction of which he had witnessed firsthand as a child during the famine of 1914–1918, Saïd Akl (in the words of the poet Georges Chaccour) would opt for remodeling himself into the "architect of the spirit of his nation."[83] In 1933, shortly after his twenty-first birthday, Saïd Akl would return to his native Zahlé unfulfilled, but unbroken. Indeed, in retrospect, his initial furtive but fruitless flirtation with Beirut would turn out to have been a turning point in his intellectual journey. As an amateur bard of a then triumphant Phoenicianism, his path would cross those of Phoenicianist elders such as Charles Corm, Michel Chiha, Elie Tyan, and Hector Klat. By July of 1935, fresh into his twenty-third birthday, Saïd Akl had already published a discerning study of francophone Lebanese poetry, analyzing and translating the works of Corm and others of his persuasion (in flawless MSA) in the Jesuit journal *Al-Mashreq*.[84] This had exposed a solid bond that had tied the young Saïd to the Phoenicianists of Beirut. Indeed, Akl's articles in *Al-Mashreq* were nothing short of an impassioned panegyric of Corm, his literary "languages" (French and Lebanese), and his poetics and historical themes.[85] In fact, we shall see later that Charles Corm's frantic interrogation of his "native Phoenician language" in *La Montagne Inspirée*—which the young Saïd had critiqued and translated by 1935—and his exhortation of it to

defy oblivion and surge back to life,[86] would become the intellectual goad of the Aklian "linguistic Lebanonism" to come.

Indeed, faint hints of resentment and defiance toward the Arabic language, which was slowly becoming an official "national" language of Lebanon, had already become apparent in Saïd Akl's early 1930s' articles in *Al-Mashreq*. Yet, Akl seemed to have already embarked on his "linguistic Lebanonist" crusade—clumsy and primitive as its early attempts might have been—prior to his encounters with Beirut's Phoenicianists. In fact, besides having become a regular contributor to *Al-Mashreq* during the early 1930s, the adolescent Saïd Akl was also an avid reader of the periodical. In Zahlé, where a young Akl attended the Institut Oriental, *Al-Mashreq* was considered the school's semiofficial quarterly publication, and Saïd Akl had become familiar with its contents and authors during those years.

Although administered by Marist friars, the Institut Oriental was erected on Jesuit property, and indeed filled an important missionary and educational lacuna when the Jesuit Order was suppressed in 1773, and when Jesuit schools and missions were shut down in Lebanon. However, the Marists maintained a close relationship with the Jesuits during their exile, and remained on their donated property when the latter returned to the Bekaa region in 1843.[87] Some of *Al-Mashreq*'s articles that Saïd Akl might have come across between 1926 and 1930, included such studies by Henri Lammens and Fouad Ephrem-Boustany that well-nigh denounced MSA and its defects, and called for its replacement by the Lebanese demotic. One such article, written by Abdelmasih Zahr, was tauntingly entitled "Is the Arabic Language Rich? Or is it Barren and Incapable of Expressing the Exigencies or Our Age?"[88] In this essay, the author was unapologetic, stating the goal of his study to be:

> not only an attempt to demonstrate that the 'amiyyaat [spoken colloquials, demotics, or dialects] were more perfect languages than the Fus-ha [MSA], nor was it to suggest that the demotics should replace MSA. [The] purpose was to illustrate the deficiency of MSA and its inability to meet the needs of modern writers, who [still attempted] to abstain from borrowing from other languages to fill MSA's lacunae. They claimed that our current [MSA] language is one of the richest languages on earth; that it had imparted much of its vocabulary to other languages. In my opinion, these are superfluous empty boastings. Arabic did indeed lend other languages its lexicon, but it also borrowed extensively from other languages all that which it lacked.[89]

This attitude must have perturbed the impressionable sixteen-year-old Saïd Akl so much, that in the course of that same year he set out to compose his first dialectal Lebanese poem, which he reportedly wrote in an inchoate form of what would become in 1961 the "Aklian alphabet."[90]

The Lebanese poet May Murr claims to have been in possession of an old notebook containing Saïd Akl's "mythical" 1928 poem, which she maintains the poet himself had entrusted her. This scrap of paper had allegedly been Saïd Akl's "first blueprint of his attempts at reforming the Arabic script," and by inference, his first dabbling with Lebanonism.[91] However, the only Lebanese-language manuscript available, (ostensibly) in Akl's handwriting, which May Murr also had in her possession and was able to show this author, was a yellowed decrepit notebook with a Lebanese dialectal translation of Lamartine's *Le Lac*, and another poetry sampling penned by Saïd Akl in an early form of his "Latin" script, dated "Spring of 1935."

It is perhaps worth noting that the 1928 date of that fateful "Lebanese language" poem fell within twelve months of the 1926 draft of the first Lebanese Constitution.[92] And although that Constitution had not formally conceded Lebanon's "Arabness," and indeed went through inordinate rhetorical pains and verbal contortions to evade the issue, Article 11 did designate "Arabic [as Lebanon's] official national language in all of the State's administrative proceedings."[93] There is much to say about the semantics of the original French text and specifically about the reference to the Arabic language in Article 11—possibly a reflection of the ongoing debate on Lebanon's identity and cultural makeup in 1926. But before examining that Article, it should be mentioned that Chebl Dammous, a native of Zahlé and a mentor of young Saïd Akl's, was one among the four original drafters of the Lebanese Constitution—the other three being Michel Chiha, Petro Trad (another Zahliote), and Omar al-Da'ouq (the only Muslim on the committee.) Saïd Akl claims that he often spent endless hours walking along the banks of the Berdawni River in the company of Chebl Dammous, and that the latter took great pleasure sharing with the precocious fourteen-year-old Akl intimate secrets about the drudgeries of Constitution drafting.[94] Saïd Akl did not give details of his private conversations with Dammous, but one can presume that the pains of writing the Constitution of a nascent multicultural state must have touched upon the issue of "national language," and that Dammous might have possibly shared his uneasiness with the young Saïd Akl. Indeed, if Article 11 were any indication, the topic of Lebanon's "national language" and national identity were eloquently evaded in the 1926 Constitution.

Article 11's "L'arabe est la langue nationale officielle dans toutes les administrations de l'Etat" (Arabic is the official national language in all of the State's administrative proceedings) could be interpreted and translated in any number of ways. The fact that the Arabic language was referred to merely as "langue nationale officielle" (or an "official national language") rather than simply a "national language" or even a plain "official language" left the door open to the possibility that *other*

"nonofficial" languages might have also constituted national languages in the land. This semantic artifice was reminiscent of Andrée Chédid's "Comment te nommer [. . .], comment ne pas te nommer?" *boutade*. But it was par excellence "Lebanese" in that it left ample room for interpretation. Which leads to the following question: Was Arabic truly considered Lebanon's national language and its only national language at that? If the answer was yes, then the verbiage of Article 11 of the Lebanese Constitution should have read: "Arabic is the official, *and* national language." There would have been no room for ambiguity in a sentence like "L'arabe est la langue nationale *et* officielle." But the intention of the drafters of Lebanon's first Constitution was clearly *not* to admit to the authenticity or "Lebanonness" of the Arabic language. Consequently, the second clause of that first sentence in Article 11 turned out to be even more problematic than the first one, for it acted as a prop and explanation of it, and a refutation of a potential recognition of the Arabic language as an authentically Lebanese speech form. The second clause maintained that the Arabic language was the official national language in Lebanon, but only "in all of the State's administrative proceedings."[95] This clarification as to the situations where Arabic should have been considered "the official national language," could be interpreted that outside of the State's administrative proceedings (where most Lebanese citizens presumably lived, worked, and interacted verbally), the "authentic" national language of Lebanon was something other than Arabic.

It is perhaps fastidious and unnecessary to peel through the semantics of Constitutional verbiage. However, it is doubtful that the drafters of the Lebanese Constitution of 1926 chose their semantics frivolously and meant them only as stylistic vagaries bereft of cultural and political implications. In fact, it is clear that the language of the 1926 Constitution was explicitly meant to conceal, in legal terminology, safeguards against any possible future tampering with Lebanon's identity. Therefore, it is quite possible that Article 11 may have been a subject of meticulous debate and controversy back in 1926. This may be especially true in view of accounts that Omar al-Da'ouq had initially been hostile to the creation of Greater Lebanon, let alone its confirmation in a binding constitutional document.[96] Clearly, elements of these deliberations appear to have seeped into Chebl Dammous and Saïd Akl's conversations. Consequently, in 1928, the sixteen-year-old Akl attempted to resolve that dubious question of Lebanon's linguistic identity by retreating into his vernacular language, and by devising a new set of symbols with which to write his "other" national, nonofficial, vernacular. Thus emerged Akl's iconic 1928 "Lebanese" poem, written in a modified Roman script.

Whether or not Saïd Akl truly began his "linguistic" crusade during his teenage years does not diminish or improve in any way the magnitude

of his movement. What is clear however is that the times in which Saïd Akl lived appeared to have necessitated at least ruminations about such changes. In 1928 Kemalist Turkey had already embarked on its scriptal reform, abandoning in the process the Arabic alphabet, and adopting a Roman script in its stead. This massive "visual" de-Arabization of the Turkish language in a sense facilitated the European reorientation of the nascent Turkish republic, and erected a psychological and linguistic barrier between "Muslim" Turkey and the Arab-Muslim world from which Ataturk was attempting to disengage. In pre-State Israel, during that same time period, a similar drift was being felt among some revisionist Zionists. Indeed, Ze'ev Jabotinsky, and Ithamar Ben-Avi (son of Eliezer Ben-Yehuda, the father of Modern Hebrew) were advocating the adoption of the Latin alphabet for the Hebrew language by 1930.[97] In fact, Ben-Avi would even publish a Hebrew newspaper, *Deror*, printed in a Latin script, which he claimed to be an evolved form of the authentic Hebrew characters; that is, the Phoenician alphabet.[98] Echoes of similar claims were already commonplace in Lebanon by the early 1930s, and a teenaged Saïd Akl appeared to have been the bellwether of that emerging movement, which not only advocated Romanization of the Arabic alphabet, but also claimed the Latin characters to be a modern evolved incarnation of the ancient Phoenician script—and therefore, the most natural choice for the codification of the Lebanese vernacular.

Nevertheless, the translation of this Aklian impulse into an ordered campaign and a full-grown Lebanese alphabetical reform (highlighted in a newspaper and other pertinent publications) was inhibited until February of 1961. This was so, perhaps, due to the political and psychological effects of a still dominant Arab nationalism, whose main organ was still MSA. Anis Freyha argued that spurning suggestions of replacing the consonantal Arabic script by the simpler vocalic (and more accurate) Latin one, stemmed from a purely insular unscientific bias, not a mere desire to preserve national or religious authenticity.[99] Still, Freyha understood the symbolic importance of the Arabic script, and acquiesced in the nesting impulses that some Arabs might brandish in order to protect MSA and its alphabet as an attribute of Arabness and Islam. That is why, by 1966, Freyha had all but abandoned (at least outwardly) all calls for the replacement of MSA. Saïd Akl, on the other hand, made it his lifelong project to break that mold and fight for spurning the Arabic language and the Arabic script. In 1961, Akl published his first "Lebanese-language" book, *Yaara*, in the Roman alphabet. The Lebanese language newspaper *Lebnaan* would begin publication in 1976, a few months after the eruption of the Lebanese War of 1975. However, due to "technical" difficulties stemming primarily from the unavailability of a commercial printing press capable of mass-producing a newspaper using the Aklian script, *Lebnaan* was

initially printed in Arabic characters (save a few articles and the poetry section of the newspaper, which did use the Aklian characters at the time). But it wasn't until 1983 that *Lebnaan* began appearing entirely in the Aklian alphabet.[100]

What is more interesting than the ostensible aesthetic or ideological grounds of Akl's advocacy on behalf of the Lebanese language and the Romanization of its writing system (which we shall see would become one of Saïd Akl's leading arguments in the 1950s and 1960s), was the functional and pedagogic pretext it was lent. It is also interesting in this regard that in 1930 Ze'ev Jabotinsky was arguing in favor of the Romanization of the Hebrew language, also advancing a purely pedagogic and academic rationale. He claimed that Romanization should be adopted as a means of improving "the study of Hebrew so as to better disseminate it, make it more readable, normalize it, and bring it closer to the Western world."[101] Interestingly, Saïd Akl also let out similar ideological arguments—couched in a pedagogic need to "facilitate the study of MSA, help standardize it, and make it more accessible to largely illiterate or semi-literate Arabs." However, during the 1950s, Akl's ostensibly academic arguments in favor of Romanization showed to have been, if not clever subterfuge, then at least a palliative preceding the repudiation of MSA from Lebanon's national canon.[102] Additionally, and again evidencing a certain philosophical affinity with Saïd Akl, Jabotinsky argued that the Romanization of the Hebrew alphabet would have the desired effect of flushing out the harsh guttural and emphatic sounds of the Hebrew language which made it acoustically akin to Arabic.[103] There was nothing sweeter to Saïd Akl's ears than such an argument in the promotion of a "gentle" and "melodious" non-Arabic-sounding Lebanese vernacular. Indeed, in the last chapter of his 1960 collection of historical short stories, *Lubnaan in Haka* (If Lebanon Could Speak), Saïd Akl emitted some of the acoustic attributes of his vaunted "Lebanese language," which he illustrated in the farthest terms possible from the Arabic language.[104] Throughout this work, Akl referred to the Lebanese vernacular as an autonomous language. But more significantly, in a didactic chapter dealing with Lebanese phonology and pronunciation, Akl would caution his readers to enunciate such distinctively guttural and velar sounds as the *'ayn*, the *khaa'*, and the *haa'*, common to all Semitic languages—including Arabic, Hebrew, and the Canaanite-Phoenician which Akl spent his entire life trying to link to the modern Lebanese vernacular—as delicate, subtle, and barely audible glottal stops.[105] This is how the Phoenician language was spoken, according to Saïd Akl; this is the phonology and tonality in which the ancient Phoenicians transmitted their language to their Lebanese offspring; and this is how the modern Lebanese descendents of the Phoenicians continue to speak and enunciate their native language today.[106] In effect, Saïd Akl was saying that it

would be superfluous to try Arabizing the Lebanese vernacular through an affected and alien Arabic phonology, because the two competencies, Arabic and Lebanese, were already two distinct speech forms. This argument, although not yet framed into an articulate "national" dogma, was making sporadic showings in Saïd Akl's written output during the 1930s and 1940s. In 1954, though not yet explicitly calling for the dismantlement of the Arabic language from Lebanon's cultural edifice, Akl had already begun making the claim that the Lebanese vernacular was acoustically, semantically, and grammatically separate, and therefore more elegant, harmonious, and subtle than MSA.[107]

Saïd Akl's assault on MSA was certainly unique and innovative in that he had always been one of the most exquisite contributors to modern Arabic literature—and perhaps remains so to this day. Yet he was unforgiving in the manner in which he advocated for spurning Arabic. It was perhaps his personal encounters as an adolescent with Charles Corm, Fouad Ephrem-Boustany—and through Chebl Dammous, Michel Chiha—that fueled his desire to "do something" about MSA. But it is also evident that, by the early 1930s, Phoenicianists of Charles Corm's and Michel Chiha's persuasion had already been grooming young Saïd Akl to become the poet laureate of Lebanonism and the first "Arabophone" insurgent against MSA. This is a claim that the poet himself had made during a meeting in the summer of 2000—although he had not used the term "grooming then."[108] In fact, Saïd Akl's claim was that Michel Chiha and Charles Corm had appealed for his help to inaugurate and codify a bona fide "Lebanese" national language.

In 1933, enriched by the personal and intellectual networks that he had forged with Phoenicianist figures in Beirut, Saïd Akl would bide his time and accept a teaching position at his alma mater in Zahlé, where he would become an instructor in Arabic Literature, Mathematics, Natural Sciences, and Drawing. Meanwhile, he continued publishing in *Al-Mashreq* and went on honing his translations of Charles Corm and Michel Chiha's work into Arabic.[109] By 1936, having acquired vast fame in Lebanon's literary circles with the publication of his first tragedy in verse, *Bent Yaftah* (The Daughter of Jephthah), Saïd Akl moved back to Beirut where he recruited the founding nucleus of his Mar-Ephrem University in Zahlé. Although short-lived, the university would boast among its faculty such erudites as Charles Malik, Fouad Ephrem-Boustany, Abdallah al-Alaayli, and Jawad Boulos. In 1975, again, under Saïd Akl's leadership, the faculty of the Mar-Ephrem University would become yet another nucleus of the new Lebanese Academy. This Academy, mimicking the mission of the prestigious Académie Française, would dedicate itself exclusively to the promotion and protection of the "Lebanese language." It would attract to its principles and its mission such Lebanese intellectuals as the poet Georges Shéhadé,

the Sunni (Lebanonist) historian Adel Ismail, the Sheikh Nadim al-Jisr, and the philologist Anis Freyha, in addition to the initial founding band of linguists and intellectuals from the Mar-Ephrem University. But what is most significant about the Lebanese Academy was the fact that its members, users of French and MSA, were passionate advocates of the Lebanese vernacular. In fact, the historian Jawad Boulos, who figured prominently among the Academy's members, and who served briefly as its president, hailed from an important northern Mount Lebanon family of nationalists and dialecticians. Jawaad's grandfather, Assaad, fought alongside one of northern Lebanon's leading folk heroes of the nineteenth century, Youssef Bey Karam. Assaad Boulos was also a historian in his own right and a close friend and biographer of Karam's. He published a biography of the latter and a short history of the Lebanese war of 1860 in vernacular.

It is clear that Saïd Akl was not the first, nor even the leading proponent of the normalization and codification of the Lebanese dialect into a "Lebanese" national language. But he was by far the first Lebanese nationalist to have considered language as one of the main pillars of being Lebanese. This was one of the major points of difference that had separated him from his Phoenicianist elders who persisted in their dependence on a presumed genetic Lebanese multilingualism. Indeed, Akl was the first to have adduced an argument presenting the Lebanese vernacular as a national and cultural symbol of the "Lebanese people," and to have relied heavily on a certain language-nation nexus in bolstering Lebanese peoplehood. His Lebanonism was to provide linguistic authenticity to the Phoenicianist national current outlined by his elders.

THE BIRTH OF LEBANONISM

Lebanonism, in its atavistic pre-Aklian manifestations, was essentially a cultural intellectual current born during the early 1920s. It gravitated mainly around Charles Corm's *La Revue Phénicienne*, maintained Lebanon's cultural specificity and distinctness vis-à-vis its neighboring Arabic-speaking countries, and vaunted an "inherently" Lebanese multilingualism, which it saw as Lebanon's national appanage and a time-honored Phoenician legacy. Consequently, to bolster this professed particularism of Lebanon's, the pre-Aklian Lebanonists harked back to the Phoenician ancestors of the modern Lebanese, and claimed them as their direct forefathers and authentic progenitors. In 1933, Charles Corm would confirm this prevalent notion of a Phoenician filiation in his national manifesto, *La montagne inspirée*, which over the years would become a "sacred writ" as it were, for those who truly believed in that particular strain of Lebanese self-perception.[110] In a pithy stanza taken from this mythical poem,

Charles Corm would hammer out the solid bonds which in his view linked the modern Lebanese to their distant Phoenician forefathers:

> Grief, good grief!/ O unspeakable grief! . . ./ Once upon a time our grandparents spoke/ Syriac in Ghazir,/ Syriac, where the Phoenicians' deftness,/ Their vigor and finesse,/ are extant to this day . . ./ Alas, no one in our days/ Can fancy finding shades/ Of our grandparents' footsteps/ In the shadow of old vines;/ Our language of yore,/ is choked for evermore/ in our gagged and scrawny throats.[111]

Although seemingly lamenting the apparent demise of the Phoenician language and the disappearance of the speakers of that language, Corm was in effect giving assurances that his forefathers, their vernaculars (most recently incarnated in Ghazir's Syriac), and their legendary talent and poise, had endured through the ages, and are currently resonant and radiating from the Lebanese mountains.[112] This theme of Phoenician resilience and Lebanese linguistic diversity will become the *idée motrice* and national ethos of an entire culture which will come to venerate and identify multilingualism with Lebanese particularism.[113] Nevertheless, in spite of this vaunted Lebanese multilingualism, the Phoenicianist themes prior to Saïd Akl (and prior to the late 1930s) were elaborated and versified almost exclusively in the French language. In 1937, Saïd Akl would break ranks with his Phoenicianist elders, and would attempt to develop their motifs into a full-fledged Lebanonism (which, up to that point, had been expressed almost exclusively in French). And, up until 1961, Akl would elaborate those ideas almost exclusively in the Arabic language. Thus would come into being Saïd Akl's equivalent to Charles Corm's *La montagne inspirée*, an Arabic language epic poem entitled *Cadmus,* which in due time, would become part of Lebanon's official school curricula.[114] But contrary to *La montagne inspirée*, which was a detailed poetic inventory of Lebanon's epic accomplishments (from Phoenician to modern times), *Cadmus* was simply an ode to one specific Phoenician personality, the namesake of the poem, the crown prince of Sidon, who incarnated millennia of Lebanese genius, Lebanese creativity, Lebanese bequests, and Lebanese values. With a magical wave of Saïd Akl's poetic wand, these Sidonian-Cadmusian gifts would, over time, become universal human values. As mentioned earlier, it was these contributions of the Phoenician Cadmus that, in Akl's estimation, were Lebanon's patrimony and cultural legacy, ones which would entitle Saïd Akl for the mission of "Lebanonizing the world."[115]

Another striking difference between Saïd Akl and Charles Corm's works was Akl's use of Lebanon and Phoenicia as a pleonasm, as if one were simply an attribute of the other. While Corm spoke of the Phoenicians as the natural ancestors of the modern Lebanese and toiled to

construct a vector of continuity between the two peoples, Akl casually spoke of Lebanese and Phoenicians interchangeably, as if referring to the same people. In his perception, Lebanon was simply synonymous to Phoenicia, an axiom that required no elaboration.[116] But it was nevertheless Saïd Akl the practitioner of multilingualism—as opposed to Saïd Akl the preacher of multilingualism—that set him apart from his Phoenicianist elders. He made use of MSA, dialectal Lebanese, as well as French as both literary mediums and means of communication, whereas Corm and the rest spoke and versified exclusively in French. But it was, more importantly, Akl's paradoxical use and perceived hidden contempt for MSA that sharpened his notoriety. But Akl was in good company. For even Taha Husayn, the doyen of Arabic *belles lettres* as it were, lamented the inadequacy of the Arabic language as a functional medium of communication, Taha Husayn had the following to say:

> One can see that the majority of those who are able to read and write [in MSA] are incapable of expressing themselves [verbally] in this literary language. The situation is even worse than that. One can notice many young people, in more than one Arab country, who truly believe and declare that this language has become incapable of answering to the exigencies of modern life. They believe and declare that this language has become incapable of expressing the depths of one's feelings in this new age [. . . and in their defense] they produce many explanations. Chief among them is the fact that they cannot learn [MSA] because it is difficult; because it is grim; and because the pupil who goes to school in order to study [MSA], acquires only revulsion for his teacher and for the language, and employs his time in the pursuit of any other occupations that would divert and soothe his thoughts away from this arduous effort [. . .]. Pupils hate nothing more than they hate studying [MSA].[117]

Anis Freyha attributed this repugnance that "arabophones" often felt toward MSA to five fundamental problems inherent to the language. He identified them as: a) "bilingualism" and the linguistic dualism or multiplicity in the kinds of languages referred to as "Arabic" and the effects of these divergences on Arabic societies; b) the arcane consonantal Arabic script; c) declensions, case endings, and the overabundance of speculative grammar and grammatical exceptions; d) the unsuitability of MSA as a language of arts and sciences; and e) the use of primitive, superannuated and arcane methods in teaching MSA.[118]

Nevertheless, it was in this spurned and maligned MSA that Saïd Akl would resolve to expound his Lebanonist principles in 1937. And it was in this MSA that his neologism "Lebanonism" would be put into print for the first time. It was also in part due to Akl's skillful use of this arcane MSA that Fouad Ephrem-Boustany would acclaim *Cadmus* as "the Char-

ter of Lebanonism," and Hector Klat would hail it as "Lebanon's Creed." But it was perhaps a popular anecdote of the times that best illustrated the significance of *Cadmus* and the character of its author. Let us remember that in 1943, a year before the official publication of *Cadmus*, the Lebanese National Pact was embraced by the Beirut Sunni and Maronite establishment represented by then prime minister Riad al-Solh, and president Bshaara el-Khoury. The consensual framework of this verbal contract consecrated the multicommunal cultural particularism of Lebanon (adding a dubious "Arab face" to the new composite Lebanese state so as to assuage the uneasiness of both proponents and opponents of its Arabness). In the midst of this charged atmosphere came *Cadmus* to announce a sui generis nondenominational Lebanonness. This bold declaration of Lebanese specificity, bereft of the obligatory labels and attributes that had up until then plagued Lebanon's political lexicon, reportedly drove Riad al-Solh to ask Akl to add a simple phrase to his Introduction; "write down," al-Solh is reported to have asked Akl, "that Lebanon is Arab!"[119] To this, Saïd Akl supposedly smiled and rebuffed the prime minister, telling him that, as a Lebanese, Akl felt no inadequacies toward either the West or the Arab World, that he—like his Cadmusian/Phoenician ancestors—had bequeathed culture, knowledge, and values to both the Arabs and the West, and that, consequently, Lebanon belonged to neither the Arabs nor the West. Therefore, Akl continued, he felt no compulsion to add or omit one punctuation mark to *Cadmus*, to irk or please anyone.

In his literary contributions in the years immediately preceding and following the publication of *Cadmus*, especially in articles published in *Al-Mashreq*, Saïd Akl would hint to the fact that his choice of the MSA to codify his Phoenician epistle (as in his other works of literature and political thought) stemmed from a purely tactical, not ideological, nor even literary necessity.[120] Indeed, his articles in *Al-Mashreq*, essentially denouncing MSA as an ossified "Latin" incapable of channeling Lebanon's rich and varied millenarian history, were hardly indicative of someone particularly enamored with the Arabic language.[121] Indeed, by transferring the features of Phoenicianism from French into MSA, Saïd Akl was clearly attempting to authenticate the claims of his Phoenicianist elders—to a genetic Lebanese polyglotism—and Lebanonize them in the perception of skeptical contemporary arabophone Lebanese political and literary elites. In fact, the "high" Arabic that Akl used in the creation of *Cadmus* was of such lexical abstruseness and syntactic and semantic complexity that it made its comprehension well-nigh impossible even to highly educated readers of MSA. And were the themes of *Cadmus* not already familiar to Lebanon's literate masses and educated elites—whether by way of the French language, or through prevailing popular legends—*Cadmus* would hardly have received the acclaim it was given.[122]

"Le Liban ne se qualifie que par soi. Le Liban est libanais."[123] In plain English: "that which is real need not be defined or proven! Therefore, Lebanon, a sui generis spontaneous construct, can only be self-defined, and cannot be labeled with any notion or any nation extrinsic to its nature." This is the lapidary brevity and simplicity with which Saïd Akl defined Lebanon. And this is the curtness with which, for the past three-quarters of a century, he warded off those men and ideas that sought to melt Lebanon into its Arab environment.

But as we shall soon discover in the coming chapters, Saïd Akl's true distinction in the roster of twentieth-century Lebanese nationalists came not from the fact that he translated Lebanon's Phoenicianist legends and myths into MSA (or even into the Lebanese colloquial). Indeed, we have seen that this Phoenicianist narrative, whether vaunted or flouted, had in effect become part and parcel of Lebanon's official history. Rather, Akl's significance stemmed from his knack for transferring a Lebanese identity grounded in history, geography, and ethnicity, as flaunted by his Phoenicianist predecessors, to one rooted and expressed in a timeless authentic "Lebanese language," the only living vector of continuity between the modern Lebanese and their ancient ancestor.

Therefore, the premise of the coming chapters will be the following: in order to explain the sui generis nature of the "Lebanese language" Saïd Akl will make the argument that the Phoenician language had never died out, that it endured, and that it continues to evolve in today's modern Lebanese demotic. However, for a considerable portion of his career, Saïd Akl seemed to have concealed this argument in repeated demands to separate Lebanon's "Arabic dialect" from MSA.[124] And although during a career spanning an entire century Saïd Akl never referred to the Lebanese vernacular as a "spoken Arabic" (or 'amiyya), but rather in the vague term "Lebanon's Language," he did initially believe (regardless of how tenuously) in a genetic relationship between spoken Lebanese and MSA, at least until the early 1960s. His more bold lines of a "Phoenician" filiation between the Lebanese vernacular and ancient Canaanite-Phoenician began taking shape in the 1960s. Of course, some of Saïd Akl's predecessors and mentors, such as Charles Corm, did advance a similar notion (of a Phoenician-Lebanese linguistic filiation), though this notion would remain restricted to the realm of poetry and romantic yearnings. Consequently, Saïd Akl would emerge as the first to have attempted to construct a Lebanese national specificity based on a purported authenticity of an indigenous non-Arabic Lebanese idiom, breaking ranks with the traditional polyglotism of his Phoenicianist elders. Akl will also attempt to lure some Muslim Lebanese into his language-based Lebanese nationalism. This is the kind of magnetism that he exuded, even among those who were not overly sympathetic to his ideas.

In the swamps of Middle Eastern linguistic nationalism, Saïd Akl was neither a lone voice nor an innovator; many in Egypt and elsewhere preceded him. Saïd Akl's uniqueness dwells in the fact that he talked the talk and walked the walk, whereas Taha Husayn, Salama Musa, and many others never took concrete decisive action to turn their intellectual musings into a written "scriptal" reality. The following chapters will deal with Saïd Akl's political activities as they related to his understanding of the language-nation nexus. In this, and especially in imparting a unique awareness and understanding of a specific Lebanese identity possessing a specific Lebanese language, the following chapters will try to demonstrate that Saïd Akl was neither a lone voice in the Middle East, nor even an innovator. He does, however, remain an intrepid and creative pioneer, and a model for emulation.

NOTES

1. Sélim Abou, *Béchir Gémayel ou l'esprit d'un peuple* (Paris: Editions anthropos, 1984), 13–17.
2. Akl, *Interview*.
3. Akl, *Interview*.
4. Akl admits that physically, his beloved woman was not all that different from the women exalted by other poets. However, he categorically refuses that his courting/seduction or bacchic poetry (or ghazal) be compared to the poetry of the Arabs. Indeed, he is especially contemptuous of Arab poets, who in his opinion wrote strictly bacchanalia of lust, based on unattainable fantasies, not any feasible reality. By contrast, his love poems, even sensual ones, were never anything short of dignifying and respectful, of both himself and the women he adulated. The following is an example he gave me to illustrate his point: "the crude Arab poet describing the physical beauty of his beloved pounces straight on her breasts and compares them to two succulent pomegranates. "Sadruki Rummaanatayn" he tells her! What is that? "Your breasts are two pomegranates?" A Woman's bosom is a couple of rounded fruits? How inane is that? How can there be attraction is such discourse and such imagery? Ah! But the breast of my beloved is nothing short of two radiant auroras. This is beauty, in its sublime sense? Did you get the idea or not? Did you get the imagery? Ah! Beautiful, no? Which means that you *can* express sensuality without stooping down to the gutters, without denuding love of its majestic beauty and dignity!" See Akl's "The Sunrise" in *Yaara* (Beirut, 1961), 60–62, "As dawn begins spilling over, white and immaculate/And as the Sun begins drowning the heights, from the peaks to the foothills, in its bounty/ Do not await the rising sun!/ Rather, with your five exquisite fingers, remove your gown/ [. . .] And reveal that tantalizing waist,/ [. . .] reveal those two radiant auroras atop your breast[. . .]/And *you* shine instead of the Sun!" For a scathing critique of traditional "bacchic" Arabic poetry, see Akl's "Al-Shi'r al-Lubnaani bi al-Lugha al-Faransawiyya" (Francophone Lebanese Poetry) in *al-Mashreq* (Beirut, July–September 1935), 381–93.

5. *Majnun Layla* is a traditional theme in Arabic allegorical poems of repressed and unfulfilled love. This motif of frustrated love often led to the madness of its male protagonist, and the eventual death of both lovers. In Arabic and Muslim societies, where men and women are usually rigidly separated in the public sphere, where open expressions of love and affection are prohibited, and where marriages are often arranged, real-life romances and open expressions of affection are relegated to the realm of fantasy. This has rendered forbidden romance and unattainable love a favored theme among traditional and modern Arab poets. Saïd Akl was cruelly contemptuous of literary and poetic motifs that reinforced that kind of frustration and repressed feelings.

6. Akl, *Yaara* (Beirut: Librairie Antoine, 1961), 7–9. Although speaking of his beloved in this poem, Akl was clearly using imageries and metaphors traditionally reserved for Lebanon. The divine beauty of the beloved, the fact that she is the subject of envy and desire of others, etc., are all themes traditionally used by Akl in describing Lebanon.

7. Akl, *Cadmus* (Beirut, Lebanon: 1947), Introduction, 132–43.

8. Akl, *Cadmus*, 209.

9. Akl, *Cadmus*, 209.

10. Akl, *Ecce Libanus*, op.cit., Article VII.

11. Akl, *Cadmus*, 209–10.

12. Akl, *Cadmus*, 22.

13. Akl, *Cadmus*, 143.

14. Akl, *Cadmus*, 145–47.

15. Akl, *Khumasiyyaat al-Siba* [The Quintains of Youth] (Beirut: Noblesse, 1991), 197.

16. In 1974, Saïd Akl published a collection of poems that he had written as elegies to departed friends and loved ones. He titled his requiem *Kama l-A'mida* (In the Likeness of Pillars), invoking the pillars of Baalbek, which symbolized boldness, tenacity, grandeur, loftiness, endurance, and everlasting life.

17. Salah Labaki, *Lubnaan al-Shaa'er* [Lebanon, the Poet] (Beirut: Maktabat Sader, 1993), 210.

18. The nature of Akl's relationship with Antun Saadé and the Syrian Social Nationalist Party is still an issue very much shrouded in mystery.

19. Labaki, 210.

20. Labaki, 210.

21. Labaki, 210.

22. Akl teaches a course in Christian Theology at the University Notre-Dame, Louayzé. Although he does not believe that one has to be a devout Christian in order to teach such a course, his own motivation is admittedly driven by his faith. Nevertheless, Akl is what one might call a "Christmas Christian." He is not a regular churchgoer, and he does not make a great fuss about dedicating his Sundays to activities that do not include Mass. In fact, my first two meetings with Akl took place on a Sunday, began early in the morning, and lasted way into midafternoon. Akl didn't seem flustered for having missed Sunday morning Mass on those days. In fact, on the first Sunday I visited his house, I was let in by his companion and assistant, Marie-Rose Amidi, and I had to wait in his living room for about twenty

minutes, because he was still in his morning bath. So it is doubtful that he had already been to church before my arrival.

23. Akl, *Interview*.

24. Akl, *Interview.*

25. Akl, "Wathiqat al-Tabadu" [The Document of Intercreationism] (Beirut, 1976) in *Saïd Akl, His Poetry and Prose*, Vol. 6 (Beirut, Lebanon: Noblesse, 1991), 203–5.

26. Akl, *L'Or est Poèmes* (Beirut: Editions Naddaf, 1981), 54.

27. Akl, *L'Or*, 54.

28. Akl, *Sagesse de Phénicie* (Beirut, Lebanon: Editions Dergham, 1999), 141.

29. My "dream sequence" took place in Akl's "salon" (as the receiving room is called in Lebanon), as I was waiting for him to finish his morning bath. The actual meeting (interview) took place in his den/home library, hence his "Tfaddal!" He was showing me the way to the den.

30. Dolly Akl Yammin is related, by marriage, to Georges Gabriel, who is the husband of my maternal aunt, Georgette.

31. Meir Zamir, *Lebanon's Quest: The Road to Statehood, 1926–1939* (New York: I. B. Tauris, 2000), 71.

32. Laura Zittrain Eisenberg, *My Enemy's Enemy: Lebanon in the Early Zionist Imagination, 1900–1948* (Detroit, Mich.: Wayne State University Press, 1994), 49.

33. Emile Eddé appeared to be among the most realistic (if not the most honest) Christian leaders of his time. When others, including the Maronite Patriarchate, were adamant on the idea of an enlarged Lebanon that would maintain its strong Christian references (in spite of its expanded Muslim population), Eddé contended that only a smaller Lebanon, with an exclusively Christian population, could preserve that unchallenged Christian identity. See MAE, Levant, 1918–1929, Serie E, Vol. 400, Carton 437, Dossier 2, for a press release by the Comité Libanais de Paris (dated September 1, 1926) denouncing rumors about the amputation of Tripoli and the Akkar region from Lebanon and their attachment to Syria, and Emile Eddé's acquiescence in the idea. See also Walid Phares, *Lebanese Christian Nationalism: The Rise and Fall of an Ethnic Resistance* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynn Rienner, 1995), 70–71

34. See *Ecce Libanus*, 1–2. See also Akl's "The Grandeur of Phoenician the City-States: Foundation of Lebanese Nationalism," in *Les Dimensions du Nationalisme Libanais*, 73.

35. See Jawad Boulos's *Les Peuples et les Civilisations du Proche Orient* (Beirut, 1983); "Les Racines du Nationalisme Libanais," in *Les Dimensions du Nationalisme Libanais*; "La Laïcité et le Proche-Orient à la Lumière de l'Histoire," in *Réflexions sur la Laïcité* (Kaslik-Lebanon, 1969); *Lubnaan wa al-Buldaan al-Mujaawira* [*Lebanon and the Neighboring Countries*] (Beirut, 1969).

36. Jawad Boulos "Les racines du nationalisme Libanais," in *Les Dimensions du Nationalisme Libanais*, 14.

37. Jawad Boulos, *Les peuples et les civilisations du proche orient* (Beirut, Lebanon: Edition Awwad, 1983), 18.

38. Boulos, *Les peuples*, 18.

39. Saïd Akl never missed a public opportunity to voice his attachment to, and appreciation of his parents. He often commented on how he had learned the value of dignity, generosity, and beauty from Chebl and Adèle.

40. At the time of my first meeting with Saïd Akl, Georges Corm, a Sorbonne educated economist, had become a Minister of Finance (and to Akl's dismay, was serving in what Akl regarded as a Syrian-puppet cabinet, bent on melting Lebanon's specific identity into that of Syria). In fact, to express the notion of "Arabist," Arabizer, or Arab sympathizer, in reference to the Lebanese Minister Georges Corm, Saïd Akl scornfully used the Lebanese active participle *m'awrib*. Patterned on the Lebanese noun-pattern *mfaw'il* (relative of the Arabic pattern *Mufaw'el*, from the verbal pattern *faw'ala*), Saïd Akl clearly meant to reveal his discontent with Georges Corm's departure from his family's (and namely his great-uncle's) dedication to purely Lebanese (non-Arabist) causes. In fact, Akl's verbal pattern *mufaw'el* (whether in Arabic or in its Lebanese variant, *mfaw'il*) is used almost exclusively to express the notions of defects, anomalies, or diseases. Therefore, Georges Corm became not only an Arabist but a spurned abnormality at that, not worthy of his illustrious family name, and as it were a traitor to Lebanon.

41. More will be said below about the *"Zehléwé"* relative-adjective.

42. See *Who's Who in Lebanon, 1967–1968* (Beirut, Lebanon: Les Editions Publitec, 1968), 432.

43. *Who's Who,* 342. Initially, the award was prized for the prestige it bestowed on its recipients; its monetary rewards were merely symbolic and amounted to the equivalent of $1,000. With the beginnings of the Lebanese War in 1975, the Prix Saïd Akl became a monthly $1,000 award, and in the early 1990s it went through yet another transformation to become a weekly one million Liras ($800) prize, still rewarding those who contribute to Lebanon's grandeur. Although in the main a literary prize, the Prix Saïd Akl was often awarded to musicians, actors, painters, journalists, and even ordinary citizens who enriched Lebanese culture with their contributions.

44. Hector Klat received the Prix Saïd Akl in October 1966. See *Who's Who,* 599.

45. All of these Lebanese belonged to the same "nationalist" circles. Hektor Klat was an author to whose work Akl had the highest respect. Klat in turn dabbled with translating some of Akl's Arabic work into French. Joseph Matar, a recipient of the Prix Saïd Akl in 2003, was a student in Georges Corm's art studio (from 1958 to 1961), and an Art faculty member at the Université Saint-Esprit-Kaslik where Akl is professor emeritus. Akl is incidentally also the one who baptized the Maronite University "Université Saint-Esprit." Antoine Berberi, a recipient of the 1973 Prix Saïd Akl, was a former student of the poet at the Académie Libanaise des Beaux-Arts (the Lebanese Academy of Fine Arts, or ALBA) in Beirut during the 1960s. And so was Jawad Boulos (Prix Saïd Akl Laureate, 1964) a colleague of the poet's from Kaslik and the Cénacle Libanais, and a cofounder of the Lebanese Academy of Zahlé.

46. Charles Corm, *La Montagne Inspirée*, 131. Philip Hitti referred to Bashir the Great (ruled, 1788–1840) as "the second architect of Greater Lebanon" (see *Lebanon in History*, 412). This awe inspiring, bushy eye-browed, towering prince, according to Hitti, commanded the unflagging respect of even enemies who sought to slight him. Among the celebrated Lebanese popular tales that extolled the character and stature of Bashir the Great (and illustrated the reverence he commanded) is one that took place during his last exile to Istambul in 1840. As the legend went, when Bashir would enter the court of the Ottoman Sultan, whose design had been

to humble his rebellious Lebanese vassal during his exile, the Sultan's courtiers would instinctively rise on their feet to greet him, in spite of the Sultan's admonitions that they remain seated. It should be noted also that the Emir Bashir was a native of Ghazir, the Corms's ancestral home. He was also reportedly baptized by the village's Capuchin friars, and received his primary education at the Ghazir Jesuit Seminary, where in 1862 David Corm would become a teacher.

47. Corm, *La Montagne Inspirée,* 131.

48. Corm, *La Montagne Inspirée,* 131.

49. Corm, *La Montagne Inspirée,* 131.

50. A Maronite village in the central Kesrouan district of Mount Lebanon, some 800 ft above the Bay of Jounié.

51. Ernest Renan, *Mission de Phénicie*, Third Facsimile Edition (Beirut: Editions Terre du Liban, 1998), 846–48. See also Maurice Barrès, *Une Enquête aux Pays du Levant* (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1924), 54–55.

52. Barrès, *Une Enquête*, 54.

53. Barrès, *Une Enquête*, 54–55.

54. See the rubric "Nos Poètes" in *Phénicia* (Beirut, January 1938), 18, and (February 1938), 30. See also Saïd Akl's work in *Cahiers de l'Est*, Number 4–5, 1949, 185–89.

55. Frederick King Poole, "They Went to the Fair," in *Saudi Aramco World*, July/August 1973, Volume 24, Number 4.

56. See Salah Labaki's biography in *Min A'maaq al-Jabal* [From the Depths of the Mountain] (Beirut, Lebanon: Maktabat Sader, 1962), 13.

57. Although Akl denies this membership, Saadé himself attests to it. See Antun Saadé's *Al-Siraa' al-Fikri fi al-Adab al-Suri* [The Intellectual Crisis in Syrian Literature] (Beirut, 1947), 61.

58. Akl, *Cadmus,* 10–11.

59. Akl, *Interview.* When asked him about the disappeared Introduction, Saïd Akl simply responded, "son époque est révolue."

60. Labaki, *From the Depths,* 13.

61. Labaki, *From the Depths,* 13.

62. See Labib Zuwiya Yamak, *The Syrian Social Nationalist Party: An Ideological Analysis* (Cambridge, Mass.: Center for Middle Eastern Studies, Harvard University, 1966), 89.

63. Charles Corm, *6000 Ans de Génie Pacifique au Service de l'Humanité* (Beirut: Editions de la Revue Phénicienne, 1988), 7.

64. Akl, *Cadmus*, 22.

65. Akl, *Cadmus*, 22.

66. Exact date unavailable.

67. Labaki, 19.

68. Freyha, *Dictionary*, 28.

69. Hitti, *Lebanon in History*, 254–55.

70. Hitti, *Lebanon in History*, 255.

71. Hitti, *Lebanon in History*, 255.

72. St. John Maron was the first Patriarch of the Maronite community and "founder of the Maronite ecclesiastical, national and military structures," not to be confounded with St. Maron, the fourth-century Syrian ascetic and patron saint of

the community. For more on this, see Butros Dau's *Religious, Cultural, and Political History of the Maronites* (Beirut, 1984), 207.

73. Freyha, *Dictionary*, 82–83.

74. A local ode entitled "O Zahle Harbor of Peace" is one with which many Lebanese are familiar and can often sing from memory. Even to those who might have never visited Zahle, and might have never met a Zahle native, the song epitomized all that which Zahle and its people have come to represent in terms of bravery, pride, generosity, and tenacity in the face of adversity. The ode went something like this: "O Zahle, harbor of peace, within you reside the breeding grounds of lions/ We shall never dwell on injustice, and we'll always stare death in the nozzle of a rifle."

75. Saïd Akl, *Kama L-A'mida* [In the Likeness of Pillars] second edition (Beirut, 1991), 7–9.

76. Akl, *Interview*.

77. Akl, *Interview*. See also Jean Durtal's *Saïd Akl: Un Grand Poète Libanais* (Paris: Nouvelles Editions Latines, 1970).

78. Akl, *Interview.*

79. Saïd Akl used a Lebanese idiomatic expression, "money scorched his hands," to illustrate his father's generosity and demonstrate how he had to give his money away as soon as he had earned it. Saïd himself seems to have inherited this quality from his father. His famed Prix Saïd Akl, although still possessing a prestigious literary value, has become a popular weekly financial award intended primarily to assist struggling young artists and literati.

80. Archives Jesuites, Vanves-Malakof, France (Universite Saint Joseph, Collection Jalabert, Missions du Proche Orient, Province S.J. de Lyon, I, Archives RPO I), 30–39. From papers copied by Father Henri Jalabert in 1963, some documents attest to the fact that Adèle Yazbeck's family, one of the most renowned landholders in Bickfayya, donated the property on which was built the Bickfayya Jesuit seminary in 1833. Young Adèle Yazbeck became a student of *Rahbet el-Maryamiyye* (Sisters of Our Lady, or Soeurs Mariamettes), a Lebanese Maronite monastic order of nuns which was affiliated with the Beirut-based Jesuit order, and administered the Bickfayya girls' school.

81. One of the languages that Saïd Akl regrets not having learned was English. Although his mother reportedly introduced him to English literature, he never developed a proclivity for the language. He mentioned that he still feels ashamed that his mother spoke English fluently, and that he never felt a need to learn the language.

82. Saïd Akl was able to complete the Lebanese equivalent of High School, although his formation was largely accomplished at home.

83. From Georges Chaccour's manuscript of the same title, an abstract of which was provided by Chaccour himself.

84. See Saïd Akl's "Al-Shi'r al-Lubnaani bi al-Lugha al-Faransawiyya" (Lebanese Francophone Poetry), in *Al-Mashreq* (Beirut, July–September 1935), 381–93.

85. Akl, *Lebanese Francophone Poetry*, 384–85. See also *Al-Mashreq* (Beirut, January–March 1936), 33–36.

86. Akl, *Lebanese Francophone Poetry*, 385. See also Corm, *La Montagne Inspirée*, 41.

87. Through the Vatican's *Bref Dominus ac Redemptor* of July 21, 1773, the Jesuit Order was suppressed, and with it the Jesuit Missions of Lebanon were closed, or devolved into the hands of other European or local Lebanese monastic Orders. The "residences" of Mount Lebanon, and Beirut were, therefore, largely acquired by the Lazarists. The Jesuit presence in the Bekaa Valley was replaced by that of the Marists. In 1843, the Jesuits returned to Lebanon, and to Zahlé, but their relationships with their substitute monastic orders remained friendly. For more on this relationship see Sami Kuri. S.J.'s *Une Histoire du Liban à Travers les Archives Jésuites* (Beirut, 1985). See also "RPO8, Dossier Billotttet, Syrie 1860," in the *Jesuit Archives, Vanves-Malakoff*, 199–207.

88. Abdelmasih Zahr, "Is the Arabic Language Rich?" in *Al-Mashreq* (Beirut, May and June 1928), 332–36, and 451–55.

89. Zahr, *Is the Arabic Language Rich?*, 334.

90. This date marked the publication of Saïd Akl's first poetry collection, *Yaara*, in a modified "Latin" script. This revolutionary book would be followed by Joseph Ghsayn's *Newwaar* in 1962. But the final and most complete form of the "Aklian Script" would only be settled by 1969, date at which begins the publication of his "Ajmal Ketub al-'Alam" [The World's Most Beautiful Books, or The World's Classics] book series.

91. Interview with May Murr, Beirut, May, 2000.

92. In fact, the first draft of the Lebanese Constitution came to light on the 17th of December 1926. See MAE, *Serie E-Levant*, Vol. 266.

93. MAE, *Serie E-Levant*, Vol. 266.

94. Akl, *Interview.*

95. MAE, *Serie E-Levant*, Vol. 26.

96. See note 8 in Fawwaz Traboulsi's *Silaat Bila Wasl* [*Associations without Links*] (Beirut, Riyad al-Rayyes Books Ltd., 1999), 33. Traboulsi argues that there were indeed antagonistic views surrounding the 1926 Constitution, and that the majority of Lebanon's Muslims boycotted the works of the committee drafting the Constitution. Even Omar al-Da'ouq, a member of that committee, was a staunch opponent of the idea of "Greater Lebanon" according to Traboulsi.

97. Ron Kuzar, *Hebrew and Zionism: A discourse Analytic Cultural Study* (New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 2001), 271.

98. Kuzar, *Hebrew and Zionism*, 271.

99. Anis Freyha, *Fi al-Lughati al-Arabiyyati wa Ba'du Mushkilaatiha* [*Concerning the Arabic Language and Some of its Issues*] (Beirut: Dar al-Nahar, 1966), 165–79.

100. One of the other parallels that can be drawn between Akl and Jabotinsky is that, like his Jewish counterpart, Saïd Akl was fluent in many languages, and translated into Lebanese some of the greatest classics of world literature, including the works of Shakespeare, La Fontaine, Molière, Plato, and Lamartine. Some of these translations were published, beginning in 1962, by Akl's "The World's Classics" series.

101. Kuzar, *Hebrew and Zionism*, 271.

102. See Saïd Akl's "Mu'dilaat wa Qiwa" [Dilemmas and Strengths], in *Les Années "Cénacle,"* 264–65. See also Akl's *Future of the Elite* (Beirut: Noblesse, 1991), 184–86.

103. Kuzar, *Hebrew and Zionism*, 271.

104. Akl, "To the Ends of the Earth," in *I Lebanon Could Speak* (Beirut: Noblesse, 1991), 299–309.

105. Akl, *If Lebnanon Could Speak*, 302. Akl actually argued that this is how the Phoenician language transmitted these sounds to the modern Lebanese vernacular.

106. Akl, *If Lebnanon Could Speak*, 302. This "acoustic" phonological lineage that tied the ancient Phoenician language and the modern spoken Lebanese was a dominant theme in Charles Corm's rekindling of "ma langue Libanaise." Indeed, Corm would argue that the relics of the ancient Phoenician language were audible not only in "la langue Libanaise," but in all the languages that the Lebanese spoke and "graced" with their honeyed accent and timber. For more on this, see Corm's *La Montagne Inspirée*, 105–6.

107. Akl, *Dilemmas and Strengths,* 264.

108. But "grooming" was not exactly the verb he used. In fact, he claimed that Chiha and Corm had appealed for his help in continuing along the path they had helped trace.

109. From the mid-1970s to the late 1980s, Saïd Akl's Weekly, *Lebnaan*, would serve as prime platform for the works of Chiha and Corm, in dialectal Lebanese.

110. In a Lebanon always teeming with vying cultural and political tendencies, detrimental as they may have been to the powers that be, Charles Corm's work was taught and recited as an article of faith in a number of (mainly) Christian parochial schools.

111. Corm, *La Montagne Inspirée,* 101.

112. I don't believe that the choice of the village of Ghazir was incidental, nor was it merely for poetic reasons to keep with the poem's rime. Ghazir was the Corms' ancestral home; it was where David Corm, Charles' father, lived and was schooled; it was home to Lebanon's most famous Jesuit seminary, where Henri Lammens got his training, and it was Ernest Renan's retreat, where his monumental *Mission de Phénicie* came to fruition. But perhaps more importantly, Ghazir was the birthplace of Lebanon's Emir Bashir II (1767–1850) whose rule, according to Fouad Ephrem-Boustany, spanned "half a century of struggles, setbacks, and glories." The Emir was reportedly schooled at the Jesuit Seminary of Ghazir, and was baptized by the village's Capuchin friars (see Fouad Ephrem-Boustany's *Studia Libanica*, 91–92). So, for Charles Corm, the ancestral bonds between the Phoenicians and the Lebanese were not merely historical, ethnic, national, or geographical. These were more intimate familial bonds. Phoenicia and its language survive in Corm's ancestral home, which was also the birthplace of one of Lebanon's most celebrated nineteenth-century princes.

113. For more on Lebanese multilingualism, see Michel Chiha's *Politique Intérieure* (Beirut, 1964), 62 and 82; *Visage et Présence du Liban*; and *Liban d'Aujourd'hui (1942)*. See also Saïd Akl's "Al-Marsah" [Theatre], in *Al-Mashreq*, Thirty-Fourth Year (Beirut, January–March 1937), 45. Here, Akl argued that "the Lebanese people were never monolingual, and therefore, could not have been influenced by aspects of Arabic literature [alone]."

114. As mentioned earlier, *Cadmus* was first published in 1944, in the midst of a worldwide upheaval, but at a time of relative optimism and promise for Lebanon. However, the forward of the book was written in 1937, and Akl himself claims to

have completed writing it in 1937. Some versions of *Cadmus* (for instance the 1991 printing) give the date of first publication in 1938; however, I have not been able to find a 1938 printing. It should be noted that *Cadmus*, despite the complexity of its Arabic language, and its incomprehensibility even to some experts of the Arabic language, would become required reading in most Lebanese schools, and part of the Lebanese middle schools' official curriculum by the mid-1950s. (My own parents, aunts, and uncles, can recite from memory entire scenes from *Cadmus*, sometimes without grasping the true meanings of the poem.)

115. Akl, *Cadmus*, 22.

116. Akl, *Ecce Libanus*, Article III, 1.

117. Taha Husayn, "Yassiru al-Nahu wa al-Kitaaba" [Simplify Grammar and Writing], in *Al-Adab*, Fourth Year, Number 11 (Beirut, 1956), 2–3, and 6.

118. Anis Freyha, *Concerning the Arabic Language and Some of Its Issues*, 9–11.

119. During my meeting with him, Saïd Akl denied that such an interchange had actually taken place between him and al-Solh. Nevertheless, and regardless of its authenticity, the tale remains a popular one, which the Lebanese often recount in the context of discussing Akl's *Cadmus*.

120. See Saïd Akl's "Theatre," in *Al-Mashreq*, Thirty-Fifth Year, Beirut, January–March 1937), 41–52.

121. Akl, "Theatre," 41–52.

122. This perhaps explains Riad al-Solh's alleged exchange with Saïd Akl; he was perhaps unable to unlock the meanings couched in *Cadmus*' Arabic language.

123. Akl, *Ecce Libanus*, Article III, 1. This is in effect the French rendition of the Aklian aphorism that fixes Lebanon's definition as follows: "Lebanon is sui generis Lebanese! It cannot be labeled, nor can it belong to any notion extrinsic to its Lebanese nature."

124. In spite of my reference to an "Arabic Dialect" (for a lack of a better expression), Saïd Akl himself never referred to Lebanon's spoken or native language as a "dialect," and certainly never as an "Arabic." His references were often ambiguous and often mentioned a "local language," or "Lebanon's language." For more on this, see for instance *If Lebanon Could Speak*.

5



Particularism as Template

Egypt has an Egyptian language; Lebanon has a Lebanese language; the Hijaz has a Hijazi language; and so forth—and all of these languages are by no means Arabic languages. Each of our countries has a language, which is its own possession.

Tawfiq 'Awwan, *Siyaasa'Usbu'iyya*, 1929

Linguistic Lebanonism—that is the idea that holds Lebanon to be a distinct nation possessing a distinct national language—had its inspiration in a number of early twentieth-century Levantine cultural currents and a myriad Middle East language reform movements. In fact, traces of the central Lebanonist argument as championed by Saïd Akl—claiming the Lebanese nation, like any other modern nation, to be a sui generis with a national language that is its own unique appanage and emblem—were already evident in the Phoenicianism, Mediterraneanism, and Pharaonism of the 1920s and 1930s. Indeed, Saïd Akl's claims of Lebanon's linguistic distinctiveness—although avant-guardist and defiant in the context of the Middle East's traditional deference to Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) orthodoxy—were echoes of similar post-Ottoman national and linguistic tremors rippling through the region in the early decades of the twentieth century. Countless literary renaissance currents, linguistic revivals, and language reform movements, although not yet as polished and deliberate as Lebanonism, were already underway in Egypt, pre-State Israel, and Turkey when an adolescent Saïd Akl began sketching the early outlines of his "linguistic revolt" to come.[1]

As mentioned in the preceding chapter, the revolution led by modern Turkey's Mustapha Kemal Ataturk, and the scriptal and lexical de-Arabization to which he subjected the Turkish language, were a source of inspiration to a number Egyptians, Lebanese, and Zionist reformers during the 1920s. Already in 1926, the Egyptian Salama Musa was calling for the abandonment of MSA, the adoption of spoken Egyptian as an official national language, the repudiation of the Arabic script and the promotion of a new "Egyptian" writing system based on Latin characters modified for Egyptian use. Musa saw the Romanization of the "Egyptian language" as an indispensable precondition to Egypt's progress and a nudge in the direction of modernity.[2] Even Taha Husayn, invested as he had been in classical Arabic literature, was at one time a vocal proponent of Musa's approach to modernity. To average Egyptians, Arabic had become a foreign tongue by the early twentieth century, claimed Husayn; even Azharites—Arabic-language scholars presumably steeped in MSA's traditions and literature—were unable to function in it and use it adequately.[3] Even Arab nationalists, natural champions of MSA as it were, were equally ill-equipped to suitably read, write, and speak their vaunted national tongue.[4]

Although his reproaches were arguably intended to spur reformation—rather than bring about the outright repudiation of MSA—Husayn's positions were not lost on those Middle Easterners already persuaded of the need to relinquish the Arabic language. His discourse and demeanor were reassuring to those, like Saïd Akl, who considered the prevalent notion of MSA as a national language and a cement of Arabness, to be a vacuous and deceitful slogan. The cruelty and dogmatism of those advocating on behalf of MSA and Arab nationalism were of no great help either. It should be remembered that Sati' al-Husri, considered by many the intellectual fountainhead and spiritual godfather of the Arabic national idea, called for the forced Arabization of those "speakers of Arabic" who dared profess a non-Arab appurtenance. He maintained that anyone who spluttered anything remotely associated with Arabic was perforce an Arab, regardless of whether or not he wished to be one.[5] He further claimed that even those people merely affiliated with speakers of Arabic were Arabs, in spite of themselves, and in spite of whether or not they were conscious of their imputed Arabness.[6] This discourse would become more irrational and more sinister when al-Husri, feigning scientific probity, proposed "studying the reasons" for which those who reject Arabism adopt such a contrarian stance. "These reasons," he mused, "may be the result of ignorance—in which case we must teach them the truth; [their rejection of Arabism] may be because they are unaware or deceived—in which case we must awaken them and reassure them; it may be a result of selfishness—in which case we must work to limit their selfishness."[7] But

under no circumstances should those "lapsed" Arabs be allowed to disown their mandated Arabness, he warned.[8]

We saw that this proto-fascist impulse of Arabism would become more articulate—and more brazen and sanguinary—with Michel Aflaq. Still it remained that al-Husri was the chief figure in this movement and the one who laid down its intellectual and psychological foundations. But in the process of preaching the cultural suppression of non-Arabs, and in threatening the annihilation of those who remained indifferent to Arabism's lures, al-Husri inadvertently landscaped the very elements of his ideology's doom, and provided the intellectual tools with which to dismantle it. In his forward to Anis Freyha's 1955 study on dialects, al-Husri admitted that the unfamiliarity of the crushing majority of Arabs with the language that purportedly defined them as a nation, and the linguistic dualism of a small group of Arab intellectuals who (for ideological reasons) practiced a deliberate, self-imposed use of MSA, were a particularly odd and harmful situation "incompatible with the imperatives of a sound national life."[9] Yet still clinging to the importance of MSA, and coming to terms with its inadequacy as a cement of Arabness, al-Husri would opt for the creation of a "new Arabic language" alternative, a crossbreed of Classical Arabic and MSA, and a mixture of different dialectal variants.[10]

This very intransigence, incoherence, and weakness of the "Arabic language/MSA" argument emboldened those, like Saïd Akl, who rejected their own putative Arabness, and set them on a course in pursuit of a linguistically based, non-Arab, local nationalism. However, unlike al-Husri's adherence to a highly stylized, elitist unspoken MSA language, Akl would set out to intellectualize a spoken idiom that had already been an authentic, spontaneous, and natural common linguistic denominator.

BREEDING GROUNDS

Saïd Akl's linguistic Lebanonism was simply the natural outcome and culmination of political Lebanonism. In that sense, like the latter, linguistic Lebanonism developed and refined the linguistic themes of Phoenicianism and Mediterraneanism. However, contrary to Charles Corm and Michel Chiha—who, by relentlessly citing Lebanon's congenital polyglotism, avoided facing the crucial issue of national language and dodged the indictments painting the Lebanese as "speakers of Arabic"—Akl's linguistic Lebanonism asserted that Lebanon's native language "is, had always been, and will evermore remain Lebanese and nothing else."[11] He also claimed that this vaunted "Lebanese language was simply a modern, evolved demotic variant of the ancient languages spoken in Lebanon; a cousin language of Arabic to be sure, but not one

of its offspring, and certainly not a dialectal variant of MSA."[12] Thus, the depiction of a bona fide Lebanese language as an identity marker, a unique Lebanese appanage and armor in the face of a prevalent MSA/Arab-identity dialectic, would become one of the ideological pillars of Saïd Akl's Lebanese national idea. By elevating a uniquely "Lebanese" language to the level of a supreme symbol of an authentic millenarian Lebanese nation, Akl remedied the preached multilingualism of his Phoenicianist predecessors—a multilingualism which, for all intents and purposes lacked the language-land-identity triumvirate setting "authentic" modern nations apart from "inauthentic" ones.

There were of course attempts, preceding Saïd Akl's travails by many decades, aiming at cultivating the use of demotic languages and raising their status from that of "vulgar" *lahjas* to the level of full-fledged eloquent, prestige languages. One such attempt was expounded in the writings of Egypt's Salama Musa and Taha Hussein. Another came in the form of a conference paper presented by Abdelaziz Fehmi Pasha at the Arabic Language Society's symposium of 1944 in Cairo.[13] There was even a tacit admission by Sati' al-Husri no less, conceding the autonomy of Arabic *lahjas* (dialects) from MSA during his inaugural address to the Advanced Arabic Studies Institute of Beirut in 1955.[14] Indeed, al-Husri would go so far as to refer to *lahjaat* (dialects) as *lughaat* (languages).[15] Still, when juxtaposed to Akl's own pronouncements and theories on language, all of these preceding attempts seemed to have amounted to mere apologies and contrition for the Middle East's dependence on stigmatized vulgar *lahjas*. Saïd Akl would transcend these "lamentations and expressions of guilt," declaring his aim to be not merely the assertion of the "axiomatic sovereignty" of demotic languages and their independence from MSA, but also affirming the different progenitors of MSA and vernacular languages.[16] He set out to ratify those dissimilarities by inaugurating a new writing system for the Middle East's demotic languages.

Here again, Saïd Akl had at his disposal precursor prototypes, with Abdel Aziz Fehmi Pasha's Romanization endeavors being perhaps the most notable (albeit unsuccessful). Indeed, audacious as Fehmi Pasha's campaign might have been, it was on the whole fragmentary and in the end remained fruitless. This was due mainly to Fehmi Pasha's own religious compunctions, and his fears of being repudiated by an orthodox intellectual establishment still besotted by MSA.[17] Yet the history of the Arabic language abounds with reformers, going back to the early centuries of Islam. It is believed that one Abu al-Aswad al-Du'ali, a seventh-century grammarian and contemporary of Imam Ali, was among the first users of Arabic to have relied on Syriac in order to codify a written standard for Arabic diacritics, dots, and case-ending symbols—evolved remnants of which are still used in today's Arabic script.[18] In more recent times, the

Egyptian poet Ahmad Lutfi al-Sayyed revealed in a 1944 interview to the Egyptian daily *al-Musawwar*, that even he had suggested the replacement of Arabic diacritics with long vowels as early as 1899.[19] Still, no proposal proved as daring or as transformative as the Turkish language reform of 1928. But that one, although entailing the replacement of an Arabic script, did not constitute a frontal assault on the Arabic language per se, as it did not involve a language related to Arabic, but rather a Turkic language.

Fouad I's Arabic Linguistic Society's Alphabetic Reform Project of 1944 entertained projects trying to emulate the Kemalist program. But its proposals never bore fruit and seemed to have actually backfired.[20] More than a dozen draft proposals and papers were submitted at the ALS conference between January 24 and January 31, 1944.[21] Among them were Abdelaziz Fehmi Pasha's and a number of other Egyptians, Syrians and Lebanese participants (such as Elias Akkawy, Mahmud Majdi, Mahmud Taymur, and Youssef Ghosteen).[22] There were also a number of proposals submitted by a Lebanese-American (Nasr Khattaar), two Syrians (Ali al-Jaarem, and Abdallah al-Ayyubi), and Father Michel Feghali, Jabbour Abdennour, Anis Freyha, and Mustapha al-Shammaa' of Lebanon.[23]

These papers caused such an uproar and were countered with such severe and acerbic criticisms throughout the Arab world, that it was finally decided to altogether suspend the idea of reforming the Arabic script, indefinitely.[24] Yet in spite of its dismissal, a brief outline of Abdelaziz Fehmi Pasha's project deserves consideration, as it illuminates the climate in which these proposals emerged, and it provides some background to the more ambitious (and arguably more successful) Aklian project of a decade later.

The Fehmi Pasha paper was forty pages long, consisted of seventy-three sections, and included three appendices.[25] It began with a general overview of the life and death of languages, comparing them to living organisms fated by nature for life, decay, death, renewal, and even rebirth.[26] Not unlike Akl—and the bulk of Lebanese nationalists who sought dissociation from MSA and its Arab nationalist motives—Fehmi Pasha recalled the life and death of Latin, and its rebirth and efflorescence into Romance languages (making allusion to MSA and its dialects, although never mentioning them by name).[27] At one point in the sixth section of his presentation, Fehmi Pasha questioned the Arabs' general reticence and passivity when faced with the suggestion of rendering their spoken languages (their only true native languages as it were) the official languages of their respective countries—"to be written as well as spoken, in the manner of French and Italian."[28] Fehmi Pasha went on to lament the burden that users of Arabic had to endure on a daily basis "trying to maintain MSA as their written language, and using other speech-forms altogether for verbal communication [. . .] thus, stunting their minds and

restricting their cultural evolution."[29] Fehmi Pasha concluded his paper by remarking that the Arabs, due to their "unusually abnormal linguistic predicament," had to be "the most wretched and unlucky creatures of this earth."[30] In considering remedial solutions, he dismissed outright the possibility of systematizing MSA into a standard spoken language, mainly due to its extreme complexity, and the "insurmountable obstacles of its arcane grammar."[31] In Fehmi Pasha's view, "the pathological sclerosis of the Arabic language" was mainly due to its defective writing system, and any remedial necessitated a radical overhaul of MSA's alphabet, if not its outright replacement.[32] In conclusion, Fehmi Pasha submitted a proposal suggesting the replacement of the Arabic script with the Latin alphabet, and arguing that this would be an urgent necessity if the Arabs were genuinely interested in their own survival as a culture and a people.[33] But like those who preceded him, Fehmi Pasha was rebuffed and dismissed with dishonor, and the remedy he proposed was rejected out of hand for the sake of maintaining tradition and orthodoxy.

This leads us back to Saïd Akl who, in spite of the hostility and derision of the wardens of MSA orthodoxy, remained undaunted in his attempts at Romanizing the Lebanese language—and providing it as a template to the rest of the Middle East. No one before Akl dared put their literary reputation and relevance on the line for such a defiant (some even say foolish) undertaking—bound only to anger the champions of Arabism and MSA. Even Anis Freyha, Michel Feghali, and a number of Lebanese Jesuit Semitists who produced numerous studies on the topic in the early 1920s and 1930s—some of whom were participants in Cairo's 1944 ALS conference, insisting on the urgency of rendering the vernacular languages of the Middle East into prestige written literary mediums—were stymied in their efforts and were forced to retract.[34] But not Saïd Akl! In fact, Akl would become more brazen and confrontational in his demands (by the late 1960s), especially as he began advancing the idea of a genetic difference between vernacular Lebanese and MSA. By 1960, a Phoenician-Canaanite-Aramaic genealogy would become one of the themes defining Saïd Akl's advocacy for the Lebanese vernacular. And unlike his precursors, who did not dare publicize their beliefs beyond pure conjectures, the Phoenician-Aramaic filiation of the "Lebanese language" would become a favored Aklian aphorism and a theory that he would set out to prove empirically.

A few decades prior to Saïd Akl, Charles Corm voiced similar, equally scandalous—albeit coy—utterances in his *La montagne inspirée*. But his references to a latent Lebanese language would go almost unnoticed; partly because they were made in French and were barely discernible to the arabophone "keepers" of MSA, and partly because they were so subtle and implicit (even in French), that even Corm's sophisticated francophone au-

diences were at the time unable to grasp their hidden sociolinguistic and ideological message. Indeed Corm's references to his "*langue maternelle*" in lamentation of the fact that like most Lebanese he was no longer able to speak his native (presumably Phoenician) tongue, were thought to have been in reference to MSA rather than to some arcane Lebanese demotic.[35]

But did Corm's *La montagne inspirée* really carry the first seeds of Saïd Akl's linguistic Lebanonism, and could Charles Corm be viewed as a forerunner and mentor to Akl's? Or could these general outlines of obvious intellectual and ideological affinities be the result of a certain cultural diffusion that prevailed in the first half of the twentieth century? After all, as Akl admitted during an interview, Charles Corm was without a doubt a towering Lebanese intellectual figure, and one for whom Akl had the utmost respect and affection. But like others with whom Akl had come into close contact and engaged in intimate intellectual intercourse, Corm was a mere "cogwheel in this sublime clockwork that was the Lebanonist idea."[36]

A CORMIAN PRECURSOR

The body of linguistic and political ideas which Saïd Akl molded and articulated into a coherent Lebanonist whole, were arguably an amalgam of already ambient (but perhaps still tenuous) concepts. For one, by the time Charles Corm and Michel Chiha began versifying on the Phoenician-Lebanese filiation, the worldly Beiruty Maronite clergy, the more rugged Maronite order of monks, and a considerable number of University of Saint Joseph Jesuits, educators and Semitists, were already floating countless studies, monograms, and scholarly articles treating the topic of the "Syriac, Canaanite, and Phoenician remnants in Lebanese Speech-Forms."[37] Akl claimed to have begun harmonizing the (still fragmentary and reticent) attempts of his elders into a clearly defined program by the age of sixteen.[38] Although this claim could not be corroborated by either Akl or any of his cohorts with any conclusive or reliable dated materials, the idea itself might have been conceivable. That is mainly because the designs that an adolescent Akl might have dabbled with were already prevalent in Lebanon—though admittedly still in an inchoate and fickle framework in the early decades of the twentieth century. In fact, *Zajal*, an early form of Lebanese dialectal poetry dating back to the thirteenth century, and traditionally improvised and transmitted orally, was still a vibrant art form in Saïd Akl's Zahlé.[39] And as regards early blueprints of dialectal Lebanese prose and poetry written in Roman script, the eminent Lebanese dialectologist, Mgr. Michel Feghali, had already published important samples of such compositions by 1918—that is a quarter century

prior to Fehmi Pasha's 1944 paper at the ALS conference in Cairo.[40] Indeed, the entirety of Feghali's 1935 *Contes, Légendes, Coutumes Populaires du Liban et de Syrie*, was written in the demotic of his native Kfar 'Abida, and transcribed in a Roman script very closely related to the one Akl would set out to codify in the late 1950s. So the claims that Akl had made a number of attempts at fixing dialectal Lebanese in written form and in Latin script by 1928, are not inconceivable given the cultural and intellectual milieu in which he was brought up, and given the prevalence of such ruminations in multilingual, multi-scriptal societies such as Lebanon's.

Furthermore, at the age of sixteen Saïd Akl was in the midst of a cultural and political universe still reeling from the effects of Ataturk's Turkish linguistic reforms. In 1928, in the former Ottoman Empire's eastern provinces, the Arabic language and script were still held in the highest esteem not only on account of their (Muslim) religious significance, but also given that the Arabic script and calligraphy were the Arab-Muslim world's highest art form—second only to poetry, and the renunciation of which would have amounted to cultural amputation. And so, naturally, modern Turkey's decision to abandon the Arabic alphabet and replace it with a Roman script adapted to Turkish sounds, created pointed political and cultural debates in (among other places) Beirut's intellectual circles. The impact of these quarrels, and the causes and effects of the Turkish example were displayed in numerous studies, critiques, and articles published in USJ's *al-Mashreq*.[41] In fact, having himself become a regular contributor to *al-Mashreq* by the early 1930's, the sixteen-year-old Saïd Akl had already been an avid reader of the journal since the mid-1920s.

It should be noted that the February 1928 issue of *al-Mashreq* featured a study by Henri Lammens entitled "The Alphabetic Controversy in the Turkic Languages." In it the author offered a combustive critique of the Arabic alphabet, blamed its consonantal writing system for the ubiquity of illiteracy among the nations that still used it—namely contemporary Turkey and the Arabic-speaking world—noted its inadequacy as a modern writing tool for a number of languages—among them Turkic and Arabic demotic languages—and proposed the adoption of an adapted vocalic Roman writing system to remedy its problems, help the spread of literacy, and democratize the acquisition of learning.[42] These themes were to become Saïd Akl's most celebrated indictments against MSA and its alphabet, and his most pungent arguments advocating for dialectal Lebanese as an official national language to be written in a new (Roman) script.

Another point validating Akl's claims to precocity and foresight is the fact that his alleged teenager's "blueprints" of a Lebanese dialectal text in a modified Latin script was not all that unusual an experiment among diglossic and multilingual pupils. In fact, Lebanese students (to this day) are not only required to study multiple languages in the same school set-

ting, and beginning with elementary school, but are also taught Arabic as a separate subject, usually in either dialectal Lebanese, French, or English. Furthermore, school curricula in Akl's times required the study of both consonantal (Arabic and Syriac) as well as vocalic (French, Latin, and English) alphabets.[43] With such a rich alphabetic and linguistic arsenal, curious pupils are bound to explore the possibilities of compensating for consonantal (often difficult and confounding) Arabic, with the simple vocalic Latin alphabet. In fact, in the introduction to his 1935 *Dictionnaire des dialectes de Syrie: Alep, Damas, Liban, Jérusalem,* French philologist Adrien Barthélemy argued that the Arabic script was ill-equipped to faithfully convey all the sounds "of the living languages of the Levant."[44] In an almost rueful tone, as if apologizing for having dared use a Roman script to transcribe an Arabic sounding dialect, Barthélemy claimed that "the three [MSA] alphabetic symbols representing the three Arabic vowel sounds, were supremely inadequate and incapable of capturing the ten vowels of the spoken languages."[45] Even to convey the sounds of a number of consonants of the spoken vernaculars, Barthélemy maintained that the use of Persian letters was often necessary if one wanted to avoid using the Roman script.[46] Still, he insisted that the use of a Latin script remained imperative if one wanted to accurately produce in writing the phonology of the vernaculars of Lebanon and Syria. We shall see in the chapter on Scriptal Lebanonism that this would become one of the principal arguments employed by Saïd Akl in defense of his adaptation of the Latin alphabet to codify the Lebanese dialect.

THE PHOENICIAN REVIEW

Charles Corm was viewed as Phoenicianism's "patron-saint" and the movement's most recognizable symbol—especially by those who orbited in the universe of his iconic and short-lived *La revue Phénicienne.* At a period in time when a nascent Lebanese entity was still in search of its national bearings, Charles Corm came to define a certain vision of Lebanon's history, identity, and memory. His notoriety was due mainly to his ability in appealing to his followers' romantic yearnings through a sublime poetic language. Like other Lebanese nationalists of his generation—poets, jurists, bohemians, aristocrats, and laymen alike—who shared Charles Corm's cultural universe, Corm himself feared the assaults to which his revered and exalted Lebanonness was being subjected by a nascent Arabism. As a result, in 1919, and at the age of twenty-five, Corm founded the periodical *La revue Phénicienne*, which he consecrated as the political, cultural, and literary mouthpiece of a group of young Lebanese "neo-Phoenicians" who went by the sobriquet *Les jeunes Phéniciens* (or The Young Phoenicians). The

aim of those Young Phoenicians, as expounded in the pages of their journal, was to guarantee Lebanon's independence, preclude its reduction to a mere "administrative addendum" (presumably an addendum to a larger Arab entity); redeem and restitute its "natural and historical frontiers"; safeguard its perpetuity and stability; protect its distinct character; nurture its "indefectible friendship with France, protector of the meek, civilizer of nations, and mother of all just causes"; unearth its timeless roots "obstinately anchored in an ancient civilization"; and finally, redeem and reclaim its glorious Phoenician past.[47]

Among the illustrious Lebanese and foreign contributors to *La revue Phénicienne*—many of whom became illustrious subsequent to their association with the journal—were, primus inter pares, Henri Lammens, and a procession of his disciples, from the poets Hektor Klat, Elie Tyane and Jacques Tabet, to future presidents, diplomats, cabinet-ministers, businessmen, jurists, scientists, and novelists including Auguste Adib Pasha, Michel Chiha, Joseph Gemayel, Paul Noujaim, and Albert and Georges Naccache. But what was perhaps the most fascinating feature about *La revue Phénicienne* was the fact that a good number of its articles were penned by mysterious authors who signed their essays with cryptic pseudonyms, a feature that would resurface decades later in Saïd Akl's own weekly journal, *Lebnaan*—which was also replete with articles evidently penned by Akl himself but cryptically signed by someone else.[48]

With regards to Charles Corm, it should be noted that a good number of the *revue*'s monikers and bylines referred to legendary Phoenician personalities, mythological characters, Syriac, Aramaic, and Canaanite toponyms, as well as Phoenician honorific titles and eponyms.[49] But noms de plume drawn from Lebanon's Phoenician past and signing articles published in a "Phoenician Review," were perhaps ordinary and predictable. However, some of these sobriquets were puzzling in that although "French-sounding," they resembled no known French names and no Gallicized Phoenician references. But upon close scrutiny, it becomes evident that *noms de plume* such as Sanchoniathon,[50] B. Routhin,[51] Berytis,[52] Ariel Caliban,[53] Camelot de la Montagne,[54] Stylet,[55] Cedar, L'Histoire, and many others, which were strewn about the journal's pages, belonged to Corm himself. For one, articles bearing the above-mentioned bylines reveal them to be lexically and stylistically the product of Charles Corm. Additionally, pseudonyms like Chinalef Rélame and Caf Rémime for instance, which resembled French-sounding proper nouns, were in fact the phonetic spellings of Charles Corm's first and last names. Chinalef Rélame was none other than *Shin, Aleph, Reh, Lam*, the spelling of "Charles" as it would appear in "Lebanese" (or in any other Semitic language for that matter). Similarly, Caf Rémime was the Lebanese spelling—*Qaf, Reh, and Mim*—of Corm's last name.

From the preceding, one might argue that the body of articles published in the *revue*, whether in poetry or prose—and whether penned by Corm himself, his alter egos, or his cohorts—were daintily smudged with his intellectual fingerprints. Even when the pseudonyms themselves were not as revealing, the style, the vocabulary, the avowed francophilia, the fervent devotion to all things Lebanese, and the overkill in the use of Cormisms (such as "Le Vieux Liban," "La Montagne," "La Voix Brune et Chaude," "Les Phéniciens Libéraux et Pacifiques," "Le Jeune Liban, Vieux de 6000 ans," etc.) were all evidence of their true author, regardless of shifty bylines.

A similar impulse by Saïd Akl, in his own journal *Lebnaan*, appears to have been in clear emulation of his elder (and mentor) Charles Corm. Additionally, Akl's *Lebnaan* was also replete with "Lebanese" translations of excerpts from the *revue Phénicienne*, in addition to other works of Charles Corm, Michel Chiha, Fouad Ammoun, and a number of former contributors to the *revue.* Consequently, one would be on solid ground speculating the extent to which Charles Corm must have influenced a Saïd Akl eighteen years his junior. One might also argue that if Chiha and others, who were many years Corm's seniors, were unable to elude the effects of his intellectual and personal charm, a young Saïd Akl could very easily have fallen under Corm's spell.

Some fourteen years after the disappearance of *La revue Phénicienne*,[56] the journal's celebrated themes would turn up in Corm's 1933 epic poem (and Phoenicianist manifesto) *La montagne inspirée*, which would be snatched off the stands with the same fervor and eagerness with which were met the *Phoenician Review* a decade and a half earlier, and Saïd Akl's *Lebnaan* four decades later.[57] *La montagne inspirée* became the prototypical "Lebanese Nationalist Poem" and opened the floodgates for a generation of intellectuals and poets who would fervently follow in Corm's footsteps, eager to enshrine, in both poetry and prose, the myths, the history, and the memory of a people. Saïd Akl was clearly one of those ensnared and molded by the spirit of Corm's "Hallowed Mountain." He was perhaps a most exquisite offspring of the Cormian sensation to have replicated Corm's themes in MSA and dialectal Lebanese. However, there seemed to have been a certain religious fervor in Corm's *Le mystère de l'amour* (1948), which might have been inspired by Saïd Akl's 1937 *Al-Majdaliyya*! But in his haste to dismiss the affinity of his and Corm's style and thematics, Akl disclosed to have also been an inspiration, and at times a mentor to Charles Corm.[58]

Still, never before *La montagne inspirée* had a Lebanese poet been able to draw such heartrending and stirring Lebanese tunes from the magnificent instrument of poetry, and never before Charles Corm's masterpiece was any Lebanese nationalist able to adorn national romanticism with lucidity

and objectivity. *La montagne inspirée* was above all a happy compilation; happy because from behind all its slips and all its somber hues, it bloomed long-lasting eruptions of hope. Corm was able to rethink, refashion, relive, and make his readers relive, elements borrowed from his country's past, only to marry them with the product of his imagination and create a new reality and unity that validated his own understanding of Phoenicia and Lebanon. Saïd Akl's Lebanonism also teemed with Corm's imagery, style, and optimism.

While historians usually earn their trophies unearthing hidden details that help the reconstruction of a distant past, poets triumph by the skilful use of their imagination, bringing into view a small universe that entices and ensnares the spirits and captivates the hearts. Poets of the Phoenician and Lebanonist school revived an ancient past by appealing to their readers' romantic yearnings rather than by convincing their intellect. The entire Cormian "Phoenician" current, its visions and its themes, were laid in fanciful imagery and mysterious narratives. Saïd Akl borrowed liberally from those Cormian poetics, however, he attempted to reinforce Corm's romantic yearnings by way of a revived national language. Although, Saïd Akl was thematically perhaps inseparable from Corm, he had placed more emphasis on reason throughout his romantic outbursts. The evident survival of the ancient Phoenician language in modern Lebanon's speech forms was a recurrent theme in Akl's work not simply because it spoke to his nostalgic yearnings, but because it stemmed from an undeniable historical and linguistic reality. The way Akl expounded his linguistic evidence (in support of his Lebanonist claims) was based not on poetic musings, but on models employed by historians of Romance Languages[59] and a number of Semitists.[60]

The fundamental Aklian axiom, with regards to the Lebanonness of the Lebanese language, could be summarized in one simple sentence; that "the languages of the civilization of triumphant [conquering] nations are seldom able to entirely replace the languages of vanquished civilizations [. . .] and so, it was in defiance of universal historical truths, and in defiance of linguistic norms that the champions of MSA and the songsters of the Arabic nation sought to Arabize Lebanon and propagate the fallacy that spoken Lebanese was an Arabic variant."[61]

Charles Corm's *La montagne inspirée* advanced similar claims. In an exuberant eruption of hope, following a long, pessimistic and somber lamentation of Lebanon's dead "Phoenician language," Corm's last poems in *La montagne inspirée* proudly reconnected with a suddenly rediscovered timelessness and imperishability of a reborn "Lebanese Language." In fact, Corm's last three poems in this collection were nothing short of a blissful and sustained "Eureka!" insisting that contrary to previously held opinions about the demise of the language of Lebanon's Phoenician an-

cestors, the Phoenician language was still alive and well, and vigorously "pulsating in modern Lebanese."[62] In a demonstration of keen linguistic savvy (unusual to one like Corm, who was purportedly untrained in the complexities of MSA and dialectology, and who knew very poorly how to read or write in Arabic, let alone discern the varieties of language and dialect), Corm shrewdly unveiled an up to then hidden vigor to his "ancestral tongue," and confidently announced the originality of "Lebanese" and its autonomy from Arabic. In this, Corm was almost skirting (even heralding) Saïd Akl's later assertions—that spoken modern Lebanese was a "sui generis Lebanese, and not an Arabic generation"—which, as we shall see later, Akl buttressed in his own original "linguistic" evidence.

Speaking of the vitality and resilience of the Lebanese language, and alluding cryptically to the "foreign languages" [namely Arabic] that were revitalized and polished by Lebanese (to the point of having become fused into it), Charles Corm had the following to say:

> These foreign-sounding words,/ which are taught to our children,/ To us are not that alien;/ For, it seems that our hearts/ Can still recall remembrances/ Of having fashioned them,/ and styled their graceful sounds!/ Indeed, it was they/ who disowned their lineage;/ Uprooted from us,/ Torn from our embrace,/ Embellished by exile,/ They now disown their race,/ Like beloved ingrates![63]

As Corm would illustrate in *La montagne inspirée*'s last poem, "Âme de mon pays" (O Spirit of my Nation), these seemingly frivolous and fanciful allegations about the Lebanese language's distinctness from Arabic, and the heavy influence that it seemed to have exerted over Arabic, etc., aren't mere vain nationalistic vaunting or whimsical poetic musing. As Akl admitted in the year 2000, and as "Âme de mon pays" would demonstrate a little further down, Corm's assertions stemmed from an exquisite and keen perspicacity, and from acute linguistic instincts.[64] His claims, although in appearance terse, and lacking in detail, can in retrospect be viewed as a clever dissimulation of an elaborate "linguistic" and political message. But how did Corm come to acquire this piercing knowledge of Arabic linguistics; how could he have spoken so authoritatively of the difference between Arabic and "Lebanese" and the influence of the latter on the former; and how did he become such a credible expert on the history, evolution and development of the "Lebanese" and Arabic languages? Could Akl's own linguistic reform have been (as he claimed) in full gestation at the time Corm was writing his "Hallowed Mountain"? And could Corm have benefited from Aklian sensibilization during his hours of poetic inspiration—as Akl claimed?[65] Whether Saïd Akl's claims were delusional or real is of little importance when juxtaposed to one irrefutable reality, the tremendous influence that Henri Lammens's work had on

Corm, Akl, and all their other Lebanese nationalist cohorts. In fact, Henri Lammens was the first "teacher" of future Lebanese nationalists to have spoken explicitly of a certain innate Lebanese-Phoenician intellectual and linguistic allure, which seduced neighboring cultures into adopting the trappings of "Lebanese" culture. Never mind that Lammens spoke mainly of a "Syrian-Aramaic," not a specifically "Lebanese-Phoenician" national genius. All the same, his Lebanese students would rationalize that Lammens was simply speaking of a specifically Lebanese appanage; a sort of a Lebanese cultural "contagion" that ensnared and drew foreign cultures to Lebanon, and assimilated them into the body of this "wonderfully athletic Aramaic culture."[66] Furthermore, in his 1929 *al-Mashreq* article ("Syria, Lebanon, and the Antiquity of their Names"), Lammens would well nigh refute all his previous works in which "Syria" was given primacy over Lebanon.[67] Thus, his description of the "Aramaic national genius [. . . and its] uncanny ability to dissolve and incorporate those who came into contact with it,"[68] was now fitted to a new history and adjusted to the dreams, vision, and aspirations of Lammens's Lebanese disciples. But perhaps more importantly, Lammens's *al-Mashreq* study recanted his 1919–1921 celebration of the "Syrian national genius," arguing that everything Syrian was in fact a Lebanese bequest, down to the very etymology of the name Syria.[69]

It is interesting to note that Akl's first attempts at putting in writing even the faintest allusion to a "linguistic" Lebanonism approximating that of Corm occurred in two instances, both following, not preceding, his encounters with Charles Corm. The first was in 1935–1936, when Akl began publishing in *al-Mashreq* excerpts of his Arabic translation of Charles Corm's *La montagne inspirée*.[70] The second instance, also in an article published in *al-Mashreq*, was in 1937.[71] But Akl began publicly elaborating the idea of the Lebanese language's durability and separateness from Arabic, and attempted to bolster his claims with his own scientific evidence, only by the late 1950s—although linguistic Lebanonism per se was officially inaugurated in 1954. Nevertheless, the 1935, 1936, and 1937 articles in *al-Mashreq* illustrated the intense intellectual atmosphere in which the Lebanese nationalist intelligentsia was orbiting at the time.

In a resonant echo of Corm's linguistic Phoenicianism and Chiha's linguistic Mediterraneanism, Akl argued in his 1937 *al-Mashreq* article that the Lebanese people's sparse, brief, and recent flirtation with the Arabic language, was simply an illustration of their inherent polyglotism and validation of their distinct non-Arab personality.[72] The article, which was essentially a critique of Arabic Literary genres, chastised modern literary historians for applying to Lebanon the same research standards applied to the literatures of the neighboring "Arab lands." Akl argued that "Lebanon and its specifically Lebanese personality," which instigated the Ara-

bic literary renaissance of the nineteenth century, had collectively entered the field of Arabic Literature only in the early eighteenth century, and that the Arabic language per se had started making inroads into the Lebanese autochthonous language only toward the beginnings of the seventeenth century.[73] Lebanon's specificity in both literature and language, claimed Akl, should become glaringly evident when unscrupulous historians stop trying to dilute Lebanon into the "universe of an Arabic literary and intellectual tradition," and when they consent to studying its cultural and literary tradition in light of its native contributions ("as written in the multitudes and successions of 'Latins' that had always been in use in Lebanon, since time immemorial"[74]). "From Ugaritic literature, to the History of Sanchoniathon, [. . .] to Longinus's 'Treatise on the Sublime,' and [Chekri] Ganem's 'Antar,'" Akl argued that Lebanon's intellectual mission "for more than 4,000 years, [. . . and] from Cadmus to Gibran," had continuously and splendidly been couched in the "civilized world's Latin languages."[75] In that same breath, Akl added that acquiescence and contentment in the study of only one stage in the history of Lebanon's literary tradition, a stage that was in any case not older than two hundred years, and one that had, anyway, been "expropriated by the literary histories of Egypt, Syria and Iraq, [. . . was] an offense against Lebanon, and a crime against history."[76] In the tradition of Corm and Chiha, Akl claimed that not only can one barely find a trace of Arabic in Lebanon prior to the sixteenth century, but that even if Arabic had been in use in Lebanon today, the country itself "was never, at any given era in its long history, a monolingual country."[77] Consequently, Lebanon shouldn't be regarded as "Arab" on account of one language currently in use (Arabic), especially when that language is hardly native to Lebanon.[78]

The value of this article dwelt not only in its evident identification with, or reiteration of Chiha and Corm's thought—a recurring theme of political Lebanonism (as well as of Phoenicianism and Mediterraneanism) is that the Arabic language was a newcomer to Lebanon, one of the more recent additions to processions of languages and cultures that passed through, enriched, and ultimately got absorbed into the Lebanese language. So, in this respect Akl's article did not really add much substance to this central Lebanonist claim. It merely developed it, provided it with literary and historical bearings, and added a new "linguistic" dimension to its central argument. More significantly, the article addressed an Arabophone audience. Here too, Akl did not merely revisit us with Corm's and Chiha's sermons on Lebanon's congenital polyglotism, or on the Arabic language's relatively recent and transitory role in Lebanon. To the contrary, it is clear that in this article Akl was actually giving concrete hints of the jolt with which he was plotting to strike at the Middle East's Arabic literary and linguistic universe in 1954. His seemingly innocuous

insinuation that Lebanon had from the dawn of time wielded the "civilized world's Latin languages,"[79] was not a mere repackaging of an oft-repeated claim of precursor Lebanese nationalists. Akl was not simply saying, as Corm and Chiha often said before him, that the Lebanese had always made use of an intellectual language of culture and literature, in addition to their native spoken vernacular.[80] By using the expression "civilized world's Latin languages," and including Arabic in the lot, Akl was simply coining a collective "linguistic" designation to refer only to a certain category of the world's literary languages. In this manner, he not only placed Arabic on the same pedestal as Latin "in life" (by recognizing it to be the language of culture, science, and literature during a certain era of its existence), but he also willfully relegated Arabic to the same burial vault as Latin. Placing Arabic among the world's "*Latin* languages," Akl was actually tolling its death knell, as early as 1937. Latin was a dead language; and if Arabic was "Latin," then so was Arabic a dead language as well.

But could the following poem from *La montagne inspirée* have been a prelude to the Aklian impending linguistic Lebanonism as well? After all, no clear reference to anything resembling a clear-cut "langue Libanaise," was suggested in Akl's 1937 article, or in any of his subsequent writings prior to the late 1950s. And prior to his publication of *Yaara* in 1961,[81] no such reference to a "Lebanese language" per se was even attempted. Of course, many euphemisms were employed by Akl to avoid referring to Lebanon's spoken language as an Arabic dialect (for instance, "Lebanon's Language," or the "Local Language"), but there were no known references to a bona fide "Lebanese language" prior to the date of Corm's *La montagne inspirée*. And so, one might say that Corm was the first minter of the expression "Lebanese language," which by 1961 would become an Aklian staple; an expression attributed to him, identified with him, and one of the fundamental tenets of his Lebanonism. Nevertheless, the origin of the term "Langue Libanaise" was inaugurated by Charles Corm, on page 41 of *La montagne inspirée*. Of course, a vague and unconvincing definition of this ambiguous "Lebanese language" would be revealed to us after some sixty-five pages mourning the death of the "Phoenician Language," but we were at least told that there was something called a "Lebanese Language," and that this language had lain dormant, suppressed by the "tyranny" of new intrusive idioms.[82] Some thirty years after *La montagne inspirée*, Saïd Akl would come to provide the linguistic bearings and the scientific coherence to Corm's romantic outbursts.

After a long and drawn out lamentation of an ancient "Lebanese language" thought to have been dead and buried (a lamentation which opens with the sustained cry "O Language of the Phoenicians,/ Beloved Lebanese tongue,/ whose letters now lay voiceless/ in sealed burial-

vaults"),[83] Corm hints to a hidden vigor and vitality of this now resurrected language.

> No, No!/ My mother tongue,/ You aren't a fallen corpse/ In the abyss of time!/ I still can feel your verve/ swelling up in my veins,/ Rising like springtide/ Surging up like a wave!/ And I still can hear/ your sparkling springs of crystal/ Churning up from the past/ Whispering to my soul . . ./ And I still can feel your blazing breath/ Shimmering over the Eastern shores!/ . . . In all of nature's shudders/ which molded the ancient spirit/ Of my distant forefathers/ It's still your warm breath,/ And it's still your whispers/ that move about the Eastern skies!/ Your soft and graceful inflexions/ Still slip their ancient drawl,/ In all the modern languages/ swarming on our shores;/ And your sparse and scattered caresses,/ Still flow in my veins,/ and cuddle with my soul!/ And I still can feel your faithful fingers/ gently knocking on memory's door/ Awakening my heart [. . .]/ With flashbacks of ancient glories/ filling my soul with joy!/ . . . For, even as I write/ in someone else's language,/ And even when I speak/ in someone else's tongue,/ It's still you in my voice/ my sainted mother's voice,/ Snug like a lover's warmth!/ For, Man here below/ in spite of varied speech-forms,/ In spite of having learnt/ his brute oppressor's tongue,/ Has kept the looks, the tone/ has kept the pitch, the pulse,/ Of his forefathers' inflections/ of his forefathers' voice!/ Exiles and vagabonds/ Through all their ports of call,/ Still carry on their language,/ cling to their ancient brogue,/ Still pilfer its perfumes/ still tinge it with the hues,/ Of their first mother's voice!/ From one universe to the next /in spite of time and space,/ The languages of Man/ still seek each other out . . ./ Let their sounds embrace,/ Let their melodies mingle,/ Let their clamors entwine!/ For, even these sweet words/ stolen from France's lips,/ With impassioned affection/ quivering in my heart,/ Still taste on my lips/ where my smiling sorrow sits,/ Still taste of a Lebanese kiss![84]

This most exquisite Cormian passage exuded an astute Aklian linguistic Lebanonism, which as mentioned earlier, passed almost unnoticed in 1933. Here, Corm was not merely handing down fanciful "linguistic" romanticism or naïve hopefulness in the imperishability of his language. He was declaring, with infinite confidence, that his native language, the language of his Phoenician ancestors, was still pounding vigorously in his veins (in the form of his spoken Lebanese language, "*ma langue libanaise*"). Corm told us in the second stanza that he could still hear the whispers and feel the caresses of his mother's language—his "*langue maternelle*." But Saïd Akl only began telling us about this "*langue maternelle*," in an inhibited cryptic form, in his *al-Mashreq* article in 1937. And only in the late 1950s did he begin telling us that the Lebanese language was the Lebanese spoken word, the vessel that contained the history of men and women who expressed (in speech) the essence of their daily lives, their needs,

their desires, and their hopes and aspirations.[85] Possessing a spoken language, in Akl's interpretation, was tantamount to possessing a historical heritage and a presence; spoken language was the catalyst of national identity. But Saïd Akl began mustering enough courage to express such impiety only in 1954, when most propagators of similar ideas had either recanted, or had already been marginalized.

ECHOES OF CHIHA

Prior to Akl's elaboration and introduction of linguistic Lebanonism in his 1954 lecture at the Cénacle Libanais,[86] all the major currents of Lebanese nationalism attempted to exorcise the cumbersome issue of Lebanon's national language through one of two equally clever schemes. One tendency inclined toward the adoption of Ernest Renan's definition of nationalism as detailed in his famous lecture "*Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?*" The other simply took cover in an allegedly innate Lebanese multilingualism. The first tendency simply saw the nation as a corporate body identified through symbols and affinities transcending the bonds of language. The second tendency viewed the idea of a "national language" in multilingual societies as a tool, not a precondition, of national unity. In the early 1950s, Saïd Akl would transform the multilingual consortiumism of Chiha's and Corm's Phoenicianism into a congruous national identity expressed in its own national language. Thus, Akl would equate the Arabic language to Latin. He would declare it sclerotic, aphasiac, and unfit for speech, and would place it on the same pedestal as the world's other moribund "Latin Languages."[87] Akin to Latin, Akl argued that Arabic was perhaps at one point in its existence a high language of culture and a vehicle of knowledge and speech, but that it had become in modern times a dead speech form and a language incapable of carrying modern thought and knowledge. And so, in negating Lebanon's imputed "linguistic" Arabness (by denying the existence of a spoken Arabic language as a common national language for all Arabs), Akl ended up disputing even the concept of Arabness, itself rooted in a certain linguistic affinity presumably shared by all users of MSA. So, by the mid-1970s, Akl would begin openly arguing that not only "Lebanon was not Arab, [. . .] but also that those who consider themselves Arabs aren't whom they think they are."[88]

It should be noted that the tendency toward adopting Ernest Renan's definition of the nation (although ubiquitous in the earliest incarnations of the Lebanese national catechisms of the early 1920s) was perhaps most eloquently rendered in a 1946 article by Nagib Déhdéh in the journal *Les Cahiers de l'Est*.[89] In this article, a Déhdéh evidently smitten by Renan's *Qu'est-ce qu'une Nation?*[90] argued that language could certainly

be a tool for national unity, but was never a necessary precondition.[91] It can certainly be a powerful integrative factor in the life of a nation, and it could act as an effective synthesizer of that nation's ideals, feelings, passions, and ideas, but again, it was not a necessary condition for its unity. Like Renan, Déhdéh also admitted that belonging to the same nation and speaking a variety of mutually unintelligible idioms could pose certain national problems. But he argued that the cases of Belgium, Switzerland and Canada offered an apt exception to that rule, as did the numerous cases of linguistically congruent "nations" that harbored culturally distinct and antagonistic peoples. For the time being, Renan's *Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?* seemed to have provided fodder to the defenders of Lebanese specificity. Like Renan's *Nation*, Déhdéh's Lebanese nation was the culmination of neither "dynastic interests, [. . .] nor racial bonds, [. . .] as human history differ[ed] markedly from zoology, [. . .] nor linguistic affinities, [. . .] nor even a community of interests, [. . .] or natural frontiers."[92] The 1882 *Qu'est-ce qu'une Nation?* would thus be resuscitated as a sound response (to would-be Arabizers), and recited as an article of faith by those who refused Arabization, both in its linguistic and cultural aspects. As if tailored specifically for Lebanon, *Qu'est-ce qu'une Nation?* would be easily paraphrased into *What is Lebanon?*

> [Lebanon] is a soul, a spiritual principle [. . .] the possession, in common, of a rich legacy of memories [. . . and] a desire to live together. [Lebanon], like the individual, is the result of a long past ripe with struggles, sacrifices and devotion to duty. The worship of ancestors is, above all, most legitimate; our ancestors have made us who we are. An heroic past, great men, glory; that is the stuff of the social capital upon which rests the [Lebanese] idea. Having common glories in the past, a common will in the present; having accomplished great feats together, wanting to accomplish some more, those are the conditions essential to becoming [Lebanese].[93]

It is not surprising that Ernest Renan's definition of the nation was so enthusiastically adopted by Lebanese nationalists. If the upsurge of a culturally dominant Arabic national idea was an obvious reason for this acceptance, one must not forget the geopolitical context in which Renan delivered *Qu'est-ce qu'une Nation?* In 1882 France, as is the case today, learning the French language, French literature, French history, and French geography were important prerequisites of being and becoming French. But in 1882, the French language played an especially important role in developing and expressing one's love for the French nation, mainly to facilitate and hasten the reconquest of Alsace and Lorraine, which were politically, linguistically, and even perhaps culturally in the thralls of Prussian (German) dominance.[94] It is in this context that Renan felt impelled to deliver his lecture, in order to minimize the role played

by language, and consequently facilitate the reintegration of Alsace and Lorraine into the French cultural-national sphere. The *Qu'est-ce qu'une Nation?* lecture, and the circumstances in which it was delivered were to make an important imprint on the thought of the promoters of Lebanese specificity. Thus, the argument became—and again, France and Renan provided the most eloquent precedent—"Lebanon could be Arabophone, and still remain non-Arab." Saïd Akl would in later years take a similar stance, arguing that Lebanese Turkophones and Francophones of the early twentieth century weren't able to turn Lebanon into a Turkish or a French appendage; so will those who claim to speak Arabic, in his view, fail in Arabizing Lebanon.[95]

Prior to Saïd Akl, Lebanese nationalists who wanted to refute taunts about Lebanon's evident Arabic linguistic genealogy—which mainly cited the Lebanese' use of the Arabic idiom in modern times—often took shelter in Michel Chiha and Charles Corm's assertions that Lebanon had from time immemorial, and certainly since the Phoenician era, been "at least bilingual, if not trilingual."[96] Both Corm and Chiha took unbounded pride in touting Lebanon's innate multilingualism. Chiha boasted that "very few nations" could claim to "possess Lebanon's rich linguistic heritage"; that polyglotism was in fact Lebanon's appanage and its distinctness; and that "a nation has presence [only] in that which distinguished it [from others], not in that which confounded and muddled it."[97] In short, pre-Aklian Cormian Phoenicianism and Chihian Mediterraneanism saw some aspects of Lebanon's cultural distinctness in its ability to wield Arabic with the same elegance and ease with which it wielded French, English, Armenian, and Turkish in modern times—and Phoenician, Greek, and Latin in antiquity.[98] And so, although Corm would occasionally lament the loss of the Phoenician tongue, he always took heart in the Lebanese-Phoenician language's incarnation and vitality in all the idioms spoken in modern Lebanon.[99] Chiha's "linguistic" Mediterraneanism was an entirely different story.

Though acknowledging Lebanon's assimilation of the Arabic language, Chiha seemed to posit that language must not be viewed as a factor in determining a nation's cultural identity, and that accordingly Lebanon should not be labeled "Arab" merely on account of one of the many idioms it had incorporated into its linguistic repertoir. However, by the early 1950s, and in an about-face from his past Phoenicianist convictions, Chiha appeared to have acquiesced in a tempered form of "Arabness" for Lebanon,[100] thus, not only justifying the use of the Arabic language as a natural Lebanese national reflex, but also attempting to convince his audiences and readers of the compatibility of his new version of "Arabness" with the pluralist "Mediterranean" Lebanese cultural myth, and the "Phoenician" polyglot legacy.[101] This acquiescence was perhaps a demon-

stration of the trademark Chihian realism, or perhaps even an expedient mercantilistic ploy (Chiha was a banker) aimed at alluring Arab capitalist neophytes into an aspiring and rapacious Lebanese marketplace. However one chooses to interpret Chiha's moderation (whether stemming from a pragmatic deference to a perceived Arab cultural and numerical preponderance, or out of sheer opportunistic [Phoenician] mercantile expediency) it is clear that the issue of language, and namely the status of the Arabic language in Lebanon, was, by the early 1940s, beginning to show signs of dissension between Chiha's Mediterraneanism, and Phoenicianism in its Lebanonist Aklian incarnation.

In a 1951 address at the Cénacle Libanais, Chiha would in fact expound his newfound Phoenician-friendly version of Arabism, thus dividing the Arab world into two culturally distinct entities; a socially, intellectually, and politically sophisticated "Mediterranean Arab world" of which Lebanon would (of course) constitute an integral part, and a culturally backward, uncouth, and primitive "Hadramut/Shatt-el-Arab" Arab world which would willingly offer itself to be fleeced, and place its destiny in the hands of predatory Lebanese merchants. Conversely, and hardly ten years prior to his "Arab" coming-out remarks at the Cénacle Libanais, in a talk delivered at the conclusion of a 1942 seminar organized by the Beirut Catholic Youth Club, Chiha was to describe Lebanon's linguistic situation as follows:

> I am alluding here to the issue of language, which would otherwise be quite plain and simple, were it not for the petty sensitivities that are often woven into it. Arabic is a wonderful language, and it is the native tongue of millions of Men; we wouldn't be who we are [today], if we the Lebanese of the twentieth century, were to forgo the prospect of becoming [Arabic's] most accomplished masters to the same extent that we were its masters some one hundred years ago. [T]he mastery of Arabic must remain a legitimate ambition of ours [. . .] in order to safeguard for ourselves, in addition to prestige and stature, our mission to always bestow unto the Arab world its greatest writers, its finest journalists, and its best poets.
>
> But how can one not heed the reality that a country such as ours would be literally decapitated if prevented from being bilingual (or even trilingual if possible)? In fact, this land has sustained, since time immemorial, a considerable number of living and dead languages. [. . .] Political imperatives decreed by our geographical position, require us to adopt [today], in addition to the Arabic language, a universal language. . . . Even before the invention of the alphabet, Lebanon-Phoenicia could not be anything but multi-lingual, which is in and of itself magnificence and power. Since the conquest of Alexander the Great, [Lebanon] did not cease being, both officially and as a matter of fact, at the very least bilingual [. . .] [we must] retain this lesson if we are intent on protecting ourselves from self-inflicted deafness, which would in turn lead us into mutism.[102]

In this passage, the still-Phoenicianist Chiha was still within the acceptable bounds of true Phoenicianism (of which he was after all a cofounder and a driving force.) He was still—perhaps timidly—preaching the basic Phoenicianist gospel. However, earlier in this lecture Chiha seemed to expound a primitive form of Akl's theories of language. Thus, he maintained that "even if relying entirely on conjecture, the blood, the civilization and the language of today's Lebanese" could not have possibly been anything but the legacy of a "fifty-centuries-old" Phoenician ancestry.[103] Although ambiguous and overly cautious in his phraseology, Chiha's allegations were ironclad in their depiction of Lebanon's cultural, ethnic, and linguistic specificity. He summoned entire passages from Fustel De Coulanges' *La Cité Antique* to buttress his argument that the Lebanese people had a historical obligation to profess a much older genealogy than the one arbitrarily imposed on them by certain regional political exigencies.[104] But again, in that same lecture, and perhaps even at the behest of his junior pupil Saïd Akl, Michel Chiha prudently insinuated that Lebanon's humanism required it to "sustain [. . . a] dead language" (such as Arabic or Latin) as it sustained innumerable "other living and dead languages" throughout its long history.[105] But the passage above also revealed that francophone Chiha, who rarely uttered a word of Arabic (or Lebanese), appeared to be making overtures to the Arabic language and its "speakers." Thus, he not only praised the Arabic language and exhorted his countrymen to relish in its beauty and learn to master it and use it. He also chided those who, like him, were at one time contemptuous of Arabic and its speakers, and he sounded a warning against those foolish enough to continue marginalizing Arabic and shunning it from their daily lives.

Naturally Saïd Akl, the purist Lebanonist, would strongly disagree with his mentor's latter-day epiphany—and perceived "conversion." He would also disapprove of the vacillations in Chiha's interpretations of the Arabic language, its role in Lebanon's cultural life, and its significance to the Lebanese cultural identity. For these, and many other reasons, which will be visited in the next chapter, Saïd Akl, would in an acclaimed 1954 *Cénacle Libanais* talk undertake to present a study candidly illustrating the uncertainties and problems ailing Lebanon's identity, and prescribing a rigid national regimen to remedy those ills.[106] It was this paper, *Lebanon: Dilemmas and Strengths*, that articulated Saïd Akl's linguistic Lebanonism, and chastised the latter-day "linguistic pragmatism" of Chiha's. Gone were in the 1954 Akl, the deference to Chiha's pragmatism and the acquittal of his occasional transgression against Lebanon's Lebanonness. The knell of a prevaricating, dubious, and opportunistic "linguistic" Mediterraneanism was thus sounded, and a rigid, straight, and pure linguistic Lebanonism would begin taking shape.

NOTES

1. Namely Mustapha Kemal's language reforms in Turkey, and Taha Hussein's, Salama Musa's, and Abdelaziz Fehmi Pasha's attempts in Egypt (all of which will be discussed at some length later in this chapter).

2. Selim Abou, *Le Bilinguisme Arabe-Français au Liban*, 258.

3. Taha Husayn, *The Future of Culture in Egypt*, 86.

4. Husayn, *The Future*, 86–87.

5. Sati' al-Husri, *Al-Muhaadara al-Iftitahiyya* [The Inaugural Lecture], (Cairo: Institute of Higher Arab Studies, 1954), 19. See also William Cleveland's *The Making of an Arab Nationalist* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1971), 127.

6. Husri, *The Inaugural Lecture*, 19.

7. Husri, *The Inaugural Lecture*, 19.

8. Husri, *The Inaugural Lecture*, 19.

9. Husri, *The Inaugural Lecture*, 19.

10. Husri, *The Inaugural Lecture*, 19.

11. Said Akl, *Ecce Libanus*, op.cit., Article V.

12. Saïd Akl, *Interview.*

13. Louis Khalil, "Kayfiyyat Tahsin al-Arabiyya, wa Mashru' al-Harf al-Latini" [How to Improve Arabic, and the Latin Alphabet Project], *Al-Mashreq* (Beirut, December 1944), 3–4.

14. For a complete text of the inaugural address, see Sati' al-Husri's forward to Anis Freyha's *Dialects and the Methodology for Studying Them*, 5–10.

15. Freyha, *Dialects*, 5–10.

16. Akl, *Interview*.

17. Salama Mussa, became one such victim. Today his writings and his literary legacy are completely unknown to the average reader of Arabic, whereas Taha Husayn, an early collaborator of Mussa's (but one who had a change of heart and abandoned, and later denounced Musa's Arabic language reform programs) remains one of the most revered figures of modern Arabic literature.

18. Al-Asfahaani. *Al-Aghaani* (Cairo: Dar al-Hilal, 1986), 225–27.

19. *Al-Musawwar*, vol. 3, number 31 (Cairo, 1944).

20. Uthman Sabri, *Nahwa Abjadiyyaten Jadeedaten* [Towards a New Alphabet], (Cairo, 1964), 90. See also Louis Khalil's article in the December 1944 issue of a*l-Mashreq*, 3–6.

21. Sabri, "New Alphabet," 90.

22. Both Ghosteen and Akkawi were of Lebanese Christian extraction.

23. Sabri, "New Alphabet," 90.

24. Louis Khalil, "How to Improve Arabic, and the Latin Alphabet Project," *Al-Mashreq* (December 1944), 3.

25. Khalil, "How to Improve," 3.

26. Khalil, "How to Improve," 4.

27. Khalil, "How to Improve," 4.

28. Khalil, "How to Improve," 4.

29. Khalil, "How to Improve," 4.

30. Khalil, "How to Improve," 4.

31. Khalil, "How to Improve," 5.

32. Khalil, "How to Improve," 5.
33. Khalil, "How to Improve," 5.
34. Michel Feghali, Anis Freyha, and Jabbour Abdennour were participants in Cairo's 1944 Arabic Linguistic Society's deliberations, and had most probably voted with the majority to abjure demands for the replacement of Arabic by vernacular, and the adoption of a simplified writing system.
35. See Asher Kaufman's Ph.D. dissertation *Reviving Phoenicia: The Search for an Identity in Lebanon*, (Waltham, Mass.: Department of Near Eastern and Judaic Studies, Brandeis University), 242–43. See also Asher Kaufman, *Reviving Phoenicia: The Search for Identity in Lebanon* (London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 2004), 143. Kaufman relates a story culled from Amine Rihani's *Qalbu Lubnaan* (9th edition, Beirut, 1971), 271–72, where Charles Corm reportedly, according to Kaufman, appealed to his hosts at a banquet in Mount Lebanon to teach him the language of his "mother and father" (presumably, Arabic). It was thus assumed by Kaufman (from his understanding of Rihani's narrative) that Corm was referring to MSA when in reality he was speaking of his parents' spoken language. In fact, part of the misunderstanding, which led Kaufman to an inaccurate translation and interpretation of Rihani's MSA account was Rihani's own unscrupulous reference to the language spoken at the banquet as "Arabic," when in reality it was a Lebanese demotic. Indeed, in 1907, the year in which Amine Rihani initiated his travels around Lebanon, of which the book *Qalbu Lubnaan* is an account, it is doubtful that "Eloquent Arabic" (as Rihani seems to suggest) was spoken in Mount Lebanon. In fact, Rihani related that since Corm was his guest at a reception hosted by Asad Restum in the latter's native village of Laqluq, "we will refuse to speak to him [Corm] in anything other than the noble language of Daad," MSA. Corm, a product of Jesuit institutions (namely the USJ in Beirut) had had formal education in MSA, although he wasn't an accomplished user of that language, just as he spoke an imperfect demotic Lebanese. His plea to Rihani and Restum to teach him the language of his "father and mother" was obviously the same plea he had made in his *La montagne inspirée*, and it referred strictly to his spoken Lebanese language and not to MSA (in spite of Rihani's skillfull jumbling of meta-linguistic terminology).
36. Akl, *Interview.*
37. See Father Joseph Hobeika's "Al-Baqaaya al-Siryaaniyya fi al-Lahja al-Lubnaniyya al-Suriyya" [Syriac Remnants in Syro-Lebanese Speech-Forms], *Al-Mashreq* (Beirut, Lebanon: July–September, 1939), 290–300. See also the article by Father Louis Khalil on "How to Improve Arabic, and the Latin Alphabet Project," in the December 1944 issue of *al-Mashreq*; Henri Lammens on "The Issue of the Alphabet in Turkic Languages" (or "The Alphabetic Controversy in the Turkic Languages"), in the February 1928 issue of *al-Mashreq*, 120–27; Rev. Abdel-Massih Zahr on "Is Arabic a Rich Language, or Is It Barren and Unable to Express Modern Needs?," in the May 1928 issue of *al-Mashreq*, 332–36 and 451–55; Father Mermerji's "Vocalic Alphabet, and Karshuny," in the February 1929 issue of *al-Mashreq*, 183–86. In addition to Father Michel Feghaly's *Etude sur les Emprunts Syriaques dans les Parlers Arabes du Liban* (Paris: Bibliothèque de l'Ecole des Langues Orientales, 1918). Although not certain of his exact age at the time of his first encounter with Corm and Chiha, he was an avid reader of *al-Mashreq*, copies of which I was

able to find in Akl's high school curriculum, in Zahlé. (The Zahlé Frères Maristes College was established by the Jesuit Order, publishers of the USJ's *al-Mashreq*.) The poet May Murr, a collaborator of Akl's, told me that she was in possession of the first Lebanese manuscript written by Akl in 1928. She was unable to produce the document (as she claimed to have misplaced it), but I was able to examine a 1930 Akl poem, written in dialectal Lebanese, and in a primitive form of what is today the Aklian script. Akl was eighteen at the time, and the possibility of him having dabbled with Latin characters to write the Lebanese dialect is conceivable, as the idea was making itself felt, not only in Lebanese Christian circles, but also in intellectual circles in Egypt as well. Furthermore, writing dialectal Lebanese in Latin characters, was also something I personally (and a good number of my friends and classmates) dabbled with while still in Middle School. It is my belief that experimentation with vocalic alphabets is an exercise that most native users of consonantal alphabets must at some point engage in, in order to compensate for their own vowel-deficient writing systems. From this, and if we were to rely solely on probability, it is not inconceivable that Akl might have dabbled with an adapted Latin alphabet at the age of sixteen.

38. Hobeika, "Syrian Remnants," 290–300.

39. On the origins of *Zajal*, see Jabbour Abdelnour's *Etude sur la Poésie Dialectale au Liban* (Beirut, Lebanon: Publications de l'Université Libanaise, 1966), 17–19. Also, see *al-Mashreq*, Volume XIV (1911), 433–37, for a sampling of Lebanese *Zajal* lamenting the capture of Tripoli by the Muslims in April 1289.

40. See Mgr. Michel Feghali's *Etude sur les Emprunts Syriaques dans les Parlers Arabes du Liban* (Paris: Bibliothèque de l'Ecole des Langues Orientales, 1918); *Syntaxe des Parlers Arabes Actuels du Liban* (Paris: Bibliothèque de l'Ecole des Langues Orientales, 1928); *Contes, Légendes, Coutumes Populaires du Liban et de Syrie* (Paris: Bibliothèque de l'Ecole des Langues Orientales,1935); and *Provèrbes et Dictons Syro-Libanais* (Paris: Bibliothèque de l'Ecole des Langues Orientales,1938). See also Adrien Barthelémy's *Dictionnaire Arabe-Francais; Dialectes de Syrie: Alep, Damas, Liban, Jerusalem* (Paris: Librairie Orientaliste Paul Geuthner, 1935) for a 1911–1935 dialectal Lebanese lexicon written in Roman letters.

41. See *al-Mashreq*'s "Mas'alat al-Abjadiyya fi al-Lughaat al-Turkiyya" [The Alphabetic Controversy in the Turkic Languages] by Henri Lammens (Beirut, February 1928), 120–27. In this article, Henri Lammens claims to have been the one who suggested to Dr. Nazem Bey, member of the Young Turks Society, the adoption of an adapted Latin alphabet for the Turkish language.

42. Lammens, "The Alphabetic Controversy," 120–21.

43. MAE, vol. 378 (Carton 436, Dossier 1); these documents give a detailed description of Lebanese school curricula from 1922 to 1929, with a break-down of missionary schools, numbers of pupils, numbers of schools, and their geographic distribution. With regard to the script issue, I cannot recall any of my own Lebanese schoolmates not devising, in one form or another, a "Latin" script in which to write our dialectal Lebanese correspondences. Lebanese sounds that could not be produced by the "French" alphabet were usually compensated for by various diacritics and accents.

44. Barthélemy, *Dictionnaire,* V.

45. Barthélemy, *Dictionnaire,* V.

46. Barthélemy, *Dictionnaire,* V.

47. *La revue Phénicienne*, Volume I, Number 3 (Beirut, September 1919), 129.

48. *Lebnaan*, which began publication a few months after the eruption of the Lebanese 1975 War, featured articles penned by such mysterious writers as Ashtarim, Melkart, Tor al-Jebaily, Porfeer, and so on.

49. As we saw earlier, these thematic and stylistic similarities in the journal's articles were also noticeable in Saïd Akl's *Lebnaan*, to a point where the reader is driven into believing that the writers are either completely smitten with the Masters (Akl and Corm in this case), or else, that the articles are all penned by the same person.

50. Sanchoniathon was a Phoenician writer, who according to the Greeks lived around 1500 BCE, and carried the title of "The Father of History" many centuries before that same title was bestowed on Herodotus.

51. B. Routhin is simply the French pronunciation of "Beiruty," or a native of Beirut; "Beyrouthin."

52. Berytis was the ancient name of Beirut.

53. Characters from Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, but also from a famous book by Ernest Renan (whom Charles Corm idealized) and in which Ariel suffers in silence under foreign domination, until he metamorphoses into a rebellious Caliban and breaks the chains of oppression.

54. Camelot de la Montagne is literally the Mountain Newsvendor, perhaps a reference to a herald of good tidings for Mount Lebanon.

55. Stylet is French for "dagger."

56. This mythical journal surged and crashed meteorically in a matter of four months.

57. Gilbert Khalifé claimed that only two thousand copies of *Lebnaan* were printed every week, but that (he assumed) readership was at a much larger scale. Many readers presumably shared the same issue. (Many issues of *Lebnaan* urged readers to "pay *only* the journal's listed cover-price." See for instance *Lebnaan*, Friday, August 19, 1983 (Beirut, Lebanon: Volume VIII, Number 393), 4.

58. Akl, *Interview*.

59. See Charles Bruneau. *Petite Histoire de la Langue Francaise: Des Origines a la Révolution* (Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, 1955), 10–11.

60. See Kees Versteegh's *Pidginization and Creolization: The Case of Arabic*, in *Current Issues in Linguistic Theory*, Vol. 33 (Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1984), 133–38. See also Joshua Blau's *The Renaissance of Modern Hebrew and Modern Standard Arabic*, 7 and 12.

61. Akl, *Interview.*

62. Corm, *La montagne inspirée,* 102 and 105.

63. Corm, *La montagne inspirée,* 102 and 105.

64. Akl, *Interview.*

65. Akl, *Interview.*

66. Lammens, "L'Evolution Historique de la Nationalité Syrienne," in *La revue Phénicienne*, 200–201. See also *La Syrie: Précis Historique,* Troisième Edition (Beirut, Lebanon: Dar Lahad Khater, 1994), 3–5.

67. Lammens, "Syria and Lebanon and the Antiquity of their Names," in *al-Mashreq* (Beirut, June 1929), 432.

68. Lammens, "L'Evolution Historique," 200–201.

69. Lammens, "Syria and Lebanon," 432.

70. Akl, "'An el-Jabal l-Mulham li Sharl Corm" [Excerpts from Charles Corm's "The Inspired Mountain"] in *al-Mashreq*, 34th year (Beirut, January–March 1936), 33–36.

71. Akl, "al-Marsah" [Theatre] in *al-Mashreq*, 34th year (Beirut, January–March 1937), 41–52.

72. Akl, "Theatre," 41. See also, Salah Labaki's own take on the issue in 1954 in "Lebanon the Poet," 88–89. In these lectures, Labaki, a close associate of Akl's and a companion (dating from the days of both their flirtations with the Syrian Social Nationalist Party) posed the following question: "Is there anything but modern Arabic poetry in Lebanon?" His reply came in the form of "there is no documented evidence to the presence of Arabic poetry in Lebanon prior to 150 years ago [1804]!" Labaki continued that "Syriac was the language of the Lebanese. And when Mu'awiya invaded Lebanon, he was unable to reach the Lebanese mountains, due to their impregnability, so he controlled only the plains," which in Labaki's rationale meant that the authentic Lebanese idiom (Syriac) continued in the Lebanese mountains up until 1804. The significance of these claims lies not in their veracity, but in the fact that scholars, journalists, intellectuals, and poets believed them and diffused them in their writings.

73. Akl, "Theatre," 41.

74. Akl, "Theatre," 41.

75. Akl, "Theatre," 41. Sanchoniathon was supposedly a Phoenician historian who, according to the Greeks, had lived in Beryte (ancient Beirut) several centuries prior to the War of Troy. He is believed to have written a history of his Phoenician contemporaries and treatises on their religions, sciences, cities, and social organization. According to Charles Corm, Sanchoniathon was given the title of "Father of History" several centuries before the Greeks bestowed that same title on Herodotus. Longinus is believed to have been born in Beirut in 210 AD. According to the Lebanonist national mythology, Longinus's legacy has been expropriated by the Greeks simply because his intellectual language was Greek (similarly today's Arabs expropriate Lebanon's modern intellectual contributions that are expressed in MSA, simply because they are in MSA). Longinus's most famous work, *The Treatise of the Sublime*, which Boileau translated into French, was the inspiration for the latter's *Art Poétique*.

76. Akl, "Theatre," 41–52.

77. Akl, "Theatre," 41–52.

78. Akl, "Theatre," 41–52.

79. Akl, "Theatre," 41–52.

80. Chiha, *Liban d'Aujourd'hui (1942)*, 50–51.

81. Akl's *Yaara* was the first literary work published in the Aklian font.

82. Corm, *La montagne inspirée*, 41.

83. Corm, *La montagne inspirée*, 41.

84. Corm, *La montagne inspirée*, 105–6.

85. Akl, *Lebanon: Dilemmas and Strengths*, 264–65.

86. Akl, *Lebanon: Dilemmas and Strengths*, 264. This address, was later that year (1954) published under two different titles: *Tomorrow's Elite*, and *The Future of the Elite in the East*.

87. We saw that this was Akl's euphemism for "Arabic is a dead language."

88. Akl, *Interview.*

89. Nagib Déhdéh, "Evolution de la Nation Libanaise," in *Cahiers de l'Est* (5ème Volume, Beyrouth, 1946), 10. See also Déhdéh's *Evolution Historique du Liban* (Beirut, Lebanon: Librairie du Liban, 1967), 71–74.

90. Like most of Lebanon's national writers, including Chiha, Corm, Akl, and others.

91. Déhdéh, "Evolution de la Nation Libanaise," 10.

92. Déhdéh, "Evolution de la Nation Libanaise," 10. See also Déhdéh's *Evolution Historique du Liban*, 71–74.

93. From *Qu'est-ce qu'une Nation?*, an Ernest Renan March 11, 1882 conference given at the Sorbonne. Reproduced in *Oeuvres Completes de Ernest Renan* (Paris: Calmann-Levy Editeurs, 1958).

94. Indeed, the German historian Mommsen made strong arguments (as did most Germans at the time) in favor of the German appurtenance of Alsace and Lorraine, based mainly on the fact that Alsacians and Lorrainians spoke a German dialect and not French. In 1870, the French historian Fustel de Coulanges (another revered figure among Lebanese nationalists) would answer Mommsen in a tone and with evidence, which Ernest Renan would elaborate in 1882. In short, De Coulanges argued that one shouldn't look at language as the distinguishing characteristic of a nation. He argued that "we speak five languages in France, nevertheless, none of us questions our national unity. Three languages are spoken in Switzerland; would you [Mommsen] say that Switzerland is a lesser nation [because of this]? [. . .] You brag about the fact that Strasbourg [the French administrative capital of Alsace] speaks German; should I brag about the fact that it was in Strasbourg that the *Marseillaise* was intoned for the first time?" What characterizes nations, argued Fustel de Coulanges, was neither race nor language. Indeed, he paved the way for Renan by saying that "Men feel it in their hearts when they constitute a nation; [and they do so] when they sense a community of ideas, interests, affections, memories, and longings." Quoted in Antoine Kazan's "The Marks of Imam Awzaa'i in the Formation of the Lebanese Nationality," in *Dimensions du Nationalisme Libanais* (Kaslik-Lebanon: Université Saint-Esprit, 1970), 13–14.

95. See *Lebnaan*, Yr. IX, No. 417 (Friday, April 20, 1984), 4.

96. Chiha *Liban d'Aujourd'hui (1942)*, 50–51.

97. Chiha, *Visage et Présence du Liban*, 143–44.

98. See Charles Corm's "Mais tristesse, tristesse!" in *La montagne inspirée*, 101–2.

99. Corm, *La montagne inspirée,* 101–2 and 105–6.

100. Chiha, *Visage et Présence,* 122–23.

101. Chiha, *Visage et Présence,* 122–25.

102. Chiha, *Liban d'Aujourd'hui*, 49–52.

103. Chiha, *Liban d'Aujourd'hui*, 23.

104. Chiha, *Liban d'Aujourd'hui*, 23–24.

105. Chiha, *Liban d'Aujourd'hui*, 49–52. See also Saïd Akl's "Theatre," 41–52. During my May 14, 2000 interview with Akl, he made several references to how Chiha and Corm would periodically consult with him on the issues of the Lebanese and Arabic languages, and how he'd explain to them that "Arabic was

a dead language [. . . and that] the language we [spoke] in Lebanon was a modern incarnation of Phoenician." According to Akl, Chiha and Corm were dazzled by his interpretations, and that Chiha once urged him to make his views public—as both Chiha and Corm were unable to tackle the issue for fear of being branded "butchers" of the Arabic language. According to Akl, Chiha saw in him the ideal person to instigate the "linguistic reform" in Lebanon, as no one in his right mind could accuse Akl of being a hater of the Arabic language, given the momentous contributions he has made to its modern literature.

106. Akl, "Lebanon, Dilemmas and Strengths," in *Les Années "Cénacle"* (Beyrouth: Editions Dar el-Nahar, 1997), 264.

6



Linguistic Lebanonism

For, whomever thinks that his birthplace is the most delicious under the sun (a statement, which for the sake of argument we can qualify as ridiculous), must also put his own mother tongue above all others, thinking that this very vulgar tongue was indeed the tongue of Adam.

Dante Alighieri, *De Vulgari Eloquentia* Book I, section 6

Although the pre-Aklian Lebanonists—Phoenicianists and Mediterraneanists alike—constructed a national locus anchored in an innate Lebanese multilingualism, Saïd Akl's Lebanonism pursued a nationalism centered on a Lebanese vernacular language as the crux and emblem of the Lebanese people's nationhood and individuality. In short, Akl's linguistic Lebanonism advanced the notion that the Lebanese people, a mature and complete nation, after the fashion of the rest of the world's modern nations, benefited from their own authentic national language.[1] With this rationale, it was no longer acceptable to Saïd Akl for anyone to refer to Lebanon's speech forms as "Arabic colloquials," "Arabic spoken variants," "Arabic vernaculars," "accents," or even "dialects" *tout court*. The "Lebanese language," Akl argued, was "not some vulgar form of an eloquent and arcane Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) [. . .]; it was an indigenous and spontaneous outcome of a uniquely Lebanese experience [. . .], and it has always been the native spoken language of the Lebanese people."[2] He maintained that, like most living spoken languages that have not yet fallen into desuetude and that continue to be verbal mediums of communication, the Lebanese language has certainly evolved and has been transformed over the millennia to reach the modern spoken form under which it is

found today.[3] But he insisted that, in spite of the passing of time, and in spite of evolutionary alterations that may have been caused by the assimilation of other people's idioms, the essence of that "Lebanese language" has remained remarkably intact, and patently Lebanese.[4] Thus, Saïd Akl would set out to demonstrate—beyond Corm's poetic yearnings—a difference in "kind," not in "degree," between the Arabic language and what he termed "the Lebanese Language"—the latter being "an evolved form of Phoenician, not a vulgar or colloquial Arabic."[5]

But things have not always been so with Saïd Akl. Although linguistic Lebanonism did ultimately pursue a trajectory of conflict with, and indeed hostility toward MSA, Akl's early strategy was initially corrective, advancing arguments similar to those of Taha Husayn, Salama Musa, and Abdelaziz Fehmi Pasha. Indeed, Saïd Akl's early reform efforts did not set out to "expunge" MSA from Lebanon. Nor were his later endeavors at establishing a distinction between the Lebanese language and MSA negationist to the point of refusing an inkling Arabic kinship. In fact, Akl's initial linguistic stance strove only at conferring on a stigmatized "Arabic colloquial" (later the "Lebanese Language") the status and stature of a prestige and official language. Never did Saïd Akl's 1930s political output intimate a significant genetic distinction between the Lebanese demotic that he advocated and the MSA that he continued to use as a literary medium. However, this theme of an inherent genetic difference between the "Lebanese" and the Arabic languages would become the central argument of Saïd Akl's linguistic Lebanonism of the late 1940s and early 1950s.

THE BONDS OF LANGUAGE AND NATIONALITY

The bonds and significance of language to nationality can be paradoxical and confusing. In the liberal Anglo-French conception of identity, language is not taken to be a precondition to the formation of a nation. This point was enthusiastically embraced by most proponents of Lebanese specificity, people who culled extensively from Fustel de Coulanges and Ernest Renan's canon. The oft-cited example that Lebanese nationalists adduced as evidence of this triviality of "national languages" to national formation was that of Switzerland.[6] From their perspective, Switzerland, a polyglot nation, with no single shared language, and therefore bereft of an emblematic linguistic integrator, was nevertheless a harmonious coherent nation.[7] Conversely, those same Lebanese nationalists argued that it was not uncommon for speakers of the same language to not exhibit bonds of ethnic or cultural kinship, and to not view themselves as members of the same nation. Nevertheless, language and language choice still carried special sentimental value in the national imagination of those

Lebanese nationalists, even if only in their poetic yearnings, and even if only for the sheer symbolism of claiming to possess an authentic national language.

In Charles Corm's words, a national vernacular, even if only imagined and romanticized, enshrined the spirit of a nation.[8] To him, a national language was like a "timeless," "warm," and "hallowed" maternal voice, surging up from a distant past, reverberating in the present, emitting shudders of national pride and tales of forebears and glory.[9] Therefore, even if acquiescing in their proverbial polyglotism, the pre-Aklian Lebanese nationalists still yearned for an authentic national language. Their touted multilingualism was, in Corm's words, simply a palliative, a subterfuge, a borrowed outer garment, and an artifice meant to ward off the dominance of any single intruder language.[10] In a sense, their multilingualism provided a line of defense against a menacing "Arabization"; it did not offer confirmation—at least not to outsiders—of Lebanon's "non-Arabness." In a world order of nation-states often defined linguistically, the Lebanese nationalists still lacked valid linguistic attributes. Charles Corm wrote searing sorrowful verses deploring this state of affairs and lamenting the "indigence," the "shame," the "frailty," and utter "inhumanity" of mute nations bereft of a native, indigenous national tongue:

> Still, I know that in London,/ In Paris, and in Rome,/ Our writers could never earn/ The same native rights;/ They will always remain,/ Despite their humanity,/ Outside the human race./ For, a people is orphaned/ When it hasn't a tongue;/ And the languages of others/ Are borrowed outer cloaks,/ In which one seems dubious,/ Shameful, frail and lifeless,/ Obnoxious and strange!/ A man without his language/ Is like an intruder barging in/ On someone else's feast,/ Even when turning up/ With the best of intentions,/ Loaded with the kindest gifts.[11]

Corm dedicated three "cycles" in his *La montagne inspirée* to the glorification of Lebanon's time-honored exploits, contributions to mankind, and bequests to the heritage of human enlightenment and creativity. But with one stroke of the pen he knocked down that lofty edifice, admitting not only the frailty, anemia, and dubiousness of nations that lacked an authentic language, but also questioning their very membership in the human race. Charles Corm fell short of proclaiming mute nations to be members of the animal kingdom, but he just as well might have. Being literally "hors de l'humanité" doesn't leave one that many options within the human realm. Certainly, to Corm's eyes, Lebanon had already redeemed itself to its rightful place among civilized nations, simply by harking back to its glorious Phoenician past. However, in the eyes of outsiders, it was degraded and shamed—on account of its lack of an authentic national language.

Saïd Akl's linguistic Lebanonism turned up, precisely, to resolve the national dissonance and shame engendered by Lebanon's national mutism.[12] He claims that he showed up on the Lebanese literary and political scene, precisely to teach the Lebanese that their national language was a living endogenous Lebanese creation, an outcome of a uniquely Lebanese experience, "not a fossilized bookish literary Arabic" or any other imported language for that matter.[13] And where a number of sterile attempts were made by Saïd Akl's predecessors to revive Syriac as a vernacular (and as way of providing an authentic language link to pre-Arab Lebanon), Akl would cut short what he viewed as his cohorts' nonsensical and delusive endeavors, maintaining that today's Lebanese vernacular was itself a demotic "Syriac-Phoenician" language, and not as generally accepted, a vulgar Arabic.[14] He claimed that although it had left its markings on the Lebanese vernacular, the Arabic language could not have substituted the earlier spoken idioms of Lebanon. In fact, through skillful manipulation of metalinguistic terminology, Akl made the claim that it was indeed the "Lebanese language"—presumably the Phoenician-Canaanite—that impregnated, metabolized, and transmuted—that is, Lebanonized—Arabic, not the other way around.[15] And once more, aspects of this approach were already being felt with Corm's *La montagne inspirée*.

Although written in French, and in the French mediaeval poetic tradition of the *chansons de geste*, chronicling local heroic exploits, *La montagne inspirée* was, as stated by its author, "traduit du Libanais"—that is, translated from Lebanese.[16] The introduction of each of the poem's three "cycles" presented them as French translations of an original Lebanese. Perhaps in emulation of Corm, perhaps as an intimation of his own prodding and guiding of Corm's, Akl's own 1960 travelogue and guide to Lebanese history, *If Lebanon Could Speak*, was itself an alleged Arabic translation from an arcane "Lebanese" original.[17] Nevertheless, like Corm's "Lebanese original," Saïd Akl's own "Lebanese version" of *If Lebanon Could Speak* was not an actual published work. However, chapters of this work (and ultimately sections that had not been initially part of the original Arabic version), began appearing, in dialectal Lebanese, and in the Aklian-Roman script, in the journal *Lebnaan* from November of 1985 until November of 1987.[18] Nevertheless, these Lebanonist references to a mysterious authentic "Lebanese language"—which, in actual written form figured nowhere in the repertoire of modern Lebanese literature prior to Saïd Akl—had initially been references to a spiritual notion, not an actual "living" language with its own written corpus of literature. With Charles Corm and Michel Chiha, one gets the impression that the "Lebanese language" they spoke of referred rather to a temperament, a state of mind, or a feeling, rather than a specific speech form.[19] Indeed, with Corm, the "Lebanese language" was depicted as a heteroclite repository of all of

mankind's linguistic patrimony, a rich hybrid of many languages.[20] On the other hand, Saïd Akl's "Lebanese language" was already taking a coherent physical shape in the late 1950s, and was no longer an allusion to a spiritual concept, mental imageries, or even romantic fantasies as was obviously the case with Corm.

Still, the MSA version of *If Lebanon Could Speak* was composed in an Arabic style, heavily imbued with vernacular Lebanese phraseology, prosody, lexicon, and syntax. Furthermore, its stories were peppered with overstated references to the proverbial "Lebanese language."[21] But the first edition of an actual Lebanese work, written in Lebanese vernacular, and in a Lebanese script, would not eventuate before February 1961, with the publication of Saïd Akl's collection of poetry, *Yaara*. Nevertheless, *If Lebanon Could Speak* was groundbreaking, became an instant best-seller, and before long a classic and a standard school textbook, going into its ninth edition by 1999. By Saïd Akl's own admission, one-third of his yearly income (estimated at about $150,000) comes from royalties earned from the sales of that book.[22] A collection of Maupassant-style short stories, *If Lebanon Could Speak* was a veritable travelogue's excursion into a seductive ten thousand years of Lebanese history.[23] In its 309 pages, Saïd Akl wove historical narrative with national fantasy, piecing together historical Lebanon, geographical Lebanon, and mythical Lebanon, finally capping his fables with the adventures, exploits, and contributions of the "Lebanese universe."[24] But perhaps the most important feature of *If Lebanon Could Speak* was its detailed illustration of the Aklian Lebanonist principles (and notably the question of Lebanon's national language), which, in 1990, Akl would condense in a "Lebanese Charter" titled *Ecce Libanus*.

REFORMATION, SUBSTITUTION

Let us remember that although a devout Christian, Saïd Akl was the most heretical of his Lebanese Christian nationalist cohorts and the most hostile to the Lebanese Confessional system. He labored restlessly to mitigate his nationalist ideas and render them as innocuous as possible to Muslim ears, and as compatible as possible with Lebanese Muslim convictions. And so naturally, the early manifestations of Saïd Akl's Linguistic Lebanonism were crouched in an ostensible "language reform" aimed primarily at the rejuvenation and modernization of the Arabic language, not at the separation of "dialectal Lebanese" from MSA. As a corollary to this supposed benevolent reformation of the Arabic language, Akl proposed the adoption of a vocalic—Latin—alphabet to replace the traditional consonantal Arabic script, which in his view was the main culprit in stunting the spread of literacy in the Middle East and contributing to the decay of

the Arabic language itself and the general stagnation of Arabic culture.[25] And so the Aklian dialectal advocacy would be born out of a purely linguistic necessity—if we are to rely on Saïd Akl's own description of his motives. Similarly, the scriptal reform, and the call for the replacement of the Arabic alphabet with adapted Latin symbols—which stemmed from a clear nationalist impulse aimed at amputating the Lebanese dialect from its Arabic genealogy—emanated from a munificent Aklian corrective motivation. In the aggregate, up until 1954, Saïd Akl's language "reform" efforts were still Arabic-friendly, were still projected as a panacea to the ills of the Arabic language—not a program for its replacement—and were still mindful of Muslim Lebanon's sensitivities and emotive attachment to MSA.

But by 1954, date at which Saïd Akl would deliver his groundbreaking *Lebanon: Dilemmas and Strengths* address at the Cénacle Libanais, his campaign for the establishment of an authentic Lebanese language, with its own adapted Latin script, would come to the fore of his ostensible Arabic language reform movement. However, the lecture's linguistic message was so outwardly altruistic and feigning concern for the Arabic language, that to those unfamiliar with the ideological dimensions of Akl's literary output of the preceding two decades, his talk would have passed for a genuine pronouncement in favor of the amelioration and protection of MSA. Conversely, to the initiated and to his audience of fans and devotees at the Cénacle Libanais, the address was a clear and unbridled indictment of the Arabic language, and a first rendering of Linguistic Lebanonism's manifesto.

From the opening sentence of his address, and with the subtlety and finesse of a Lebanese merchant, Saïd Akl sought to dissociate himself from Lebanon's political classes and from its peddlers of confessionalism, nationalism, political sorcery, and traditional clientalism and corruption.[26] But perhaps even more significantly, Akl whose name had by 1954 become well nigh synonymous with the most "purist" (and perhaps even the most hardline) forms of Lebanese nationalisms, sought in his *Dilemmas and Strengths* to dissociate himself from the "bickering of Phoenicianizers and Arabizers."[27] His primary concern appeared to have been the remedial of MSA's ills and a prescription for its reinvigoration. Thus, he began:

> Tonight, I shall not seek to discuss mythical dilemmas, be they murderous confessionalism, migrations that drain this country of its sons and daughters, economic problems that threaten to turn us into a nation of paupers, or antagonisms between Phoenicianizers and Arabizers, which split us into two opposing camps, each attempting to negate the other. Instead, I shall endeavor to tackle those of Lebanon's problems, which are truly problems

> in that they impact the very foundations of the Lebanese spirit. The first dilemma is that of language and script; and I shall initiate my talk with this, because the issue of language and script affects the repository of our intellect and cultural heritage. As long as we [are unwilling to] reform that repository, that vessel of our intellectual patrimony, we will remain unable to possess its worthy contents. What I wish to say is that all of mankind's institutions, from Ideas to constitutional law, and from higher education to oration, all of these traditions use language and script as their ultimate vessel and repository. And when a people's language and writing system become corrupt, all of its institutions become corrupt.[28]

Saïd Akl proceeded to give a fascinating definition of his philosophy on language and the importance of language in the progress and evolution of mankind, but he didn't reveal the slightest hint of a hidden political (Lebanese nationalist) project in his address. He peppered the talk with his trademark statistics on the cultural frailty of diglossic peoples and the fated life and death of languages; he made interminable references to Greeks and Romans and the history of their own languages' conflicts and transformations, and the centrality of these transformations to any language's vitality. He also produced an array of linguistic and sociolinguistic illustrations offering historical parallels to the language situation in Lebanon. And some of the illustrations Akl offered, made reference to Sanskrit and proto-Semitic, and the evolution and fusion of the Roman idiom into the languages of France, Italy, Spain, England, and so on. But never once, during the course of a lecture that lasted nearly an hour, did Saïd Akl make explicit reference to the Arabic language or the Arab peoples per se. Never once did he call specifically for the abrogation of the use of MSA in Lebanon, or for its substitution with another idiom, or for the adoption of a new script for its writing. Still, his lecture smacked of a devastating "prelude" to his upcoming carefully choreographed requiem for the Arabic language. Thus, without making the slightest allusion to the Arabic language itself, but with overwrought references to Latin and Romance "neo-Latins" (and with excited allusions to the death of the former and the vitality of the latter), Akl was drawing an evident parallel between Arabic and Latin, and was preparing the grounds for Arabic's dismantlement.

In summation, Saïd Akl's linguistic "reform" journey took us from a rationale arguing that a language reform movement in Lebanon stemmed merely from a linguistic necessity, to almost a disclosure that his (language reform) ostentations were devised primarily to serve an ideological program. In other words, from a sociocivilizational conception of language (as a tool for communication, with the other, and the self) Akl turned linguistic Lebanonism into the armored division of his political Lebanonism.

EVOLUTION OF THE "LEBANESE LANGUAGE" CLAIM

Championing a Lebanese vernacular as the perennial language of the Lebanese people and as a symbol of Lebanese nationalism, was an idea that would set the Lebanonists on a collision course with Arabists and a majority of Lebanese Muslims, who not only were conditioned to view the Lebanese vernacular as a mere dialectal variant of Arabic, but who also held the latter at the pinnacle of their religious and cultural identity. As a result, not only was the Aklian "Lebanese language" sophistry bound to earn him and his followers the scorn of Arabists, but it was also a sure recipe for Muslim hostility and consequent rejection of all that which Lebanonism represented. But Akl would remain undaunted, and as a buttress to national specificity he would demand and toil to assert Lebanon's linguistic authenticity and separateness from MSA. To this end he would argue that although the seventh-century Arab conquest of Lebanon had brought with it a new idiom, the conquering Arabic language was unable to shake the pre-Arabic foundations of the Lebanese vernacular.[29] In fact Akl made the claim that Arabic exerted a mere lexical influence, not a significant structural alteration on the Lebanese idiom, thus maintaining Lebanon's Canaanite and Aramaic morphological, semantic, grammatical, and phonological foundations.[30]

Certainly, claimed Akl, Lebanon's linguistic journey did not begin—nor will it end—in its linguistic encounters with Arabic. If anything, Lebanon's language is a symbiosis where Semitic linguistic elements are dominant, but where Latin, neo-Latin, Greek, and Turkish residues still stand out.[31] To him, the Lebanese language, whether woven into Arabisms, Aramaisms, Syrianisms, Francisms, or Latinisms, remains the most manifest and authentic vector connecting modern Lebanon to its remote Phoenician past, and a bright expression of the spirit of the nation.[32] Akl believed that Arabic was able to gain primacy over Lebanon's autochthonous language only as a written medium, only as an intellectual academic language, and only very recently in the history of Lebanon.[33] It never became a spoken language and was never able to assimilate and dissolve the country's native language.[34] Of course, these claims would smack of delusions of the most vulgar kind to Akl's adversaries. In their judgment, accepted wisdom and traditional linguistic truism held Lebanon's spoken vernacular to be simply an Arabic dialect. Akl argued that "this is a scandalous misconception and a hackneyed oversimplification concocted to serve Arabism," and one analogous to Frenchmen, Spaniards, or Englishmen being told that they spoke different Latin dialectal variants (rather than simply French, Spanish, or English).[35]

Certainly, although not commonly accepted, Akl's theories were neither novel nor revolutionary for their time. In fact there are a number of

modern mainstream sociolinguists and specialists of Arabic linguistics who agree with his somewhat fanciful portrayal of the Lebanese dialect as a Lebanese language.[36] French sociolinguist Louis-Jean Calvet coincidentally corroborates Akl's conceptions of the Lebanese "language," by invoking a French-Latin analogy.[37] In his monumental *La Guerre des Langues et Politique Linguistique*, Calvet argued that all languages, in order to maintain themselves alive, have to go through appreciable transformations. Thus, he claimed "the French of today speak Latin, though it is a twenty-centuries old Latin, stamped with a Germanic sub-layer, the language of our Gallic ancestors," and in a sense can no longer be seriously characterized as Latin.[38] Attractive analogies like this one would never be lost on Saïd Akl. In fact, his central linguistic Lebanonist argument applied incessantly this view, in its entirety, to his "Lebanese language" (only with the obligatory exaggeration of the Phoenician/Aramaic filiation, and the downplaying of the Arabic element).[39]

In a sense, Akl's Linguistic Lebanonism aimed to popularize a new rationale in looking at the Lebanese language. He sought to abolish, or at least correct, the prevailing Lebanese—and Middle Eastern—mentality, which perceptually integrated the traditional popular unwritten idioms of the region with a written MSA (referring to both as two degrees of the same language, one literary/eloquent, the other colloquial/vulgar).[40] It was precisely this faulty perception, and misleading oversimplification of the diglossic situation in the Middle East that constituted the veritable linguistic dilemma that Akl sought to confront. In his view, this dilemma not only caused an intellectual etiolation and cultural stagnation in the Middle East in general, but became also an instrument through which the varied cultures and ethnicities of the region—the Lebanese people included—were devalued and denied their non-Arab patrimony.[41]

Saïd Akl was fond of applying Latin analogies in illustrating his linguistic argument. He was particularly addicted to repeating the claim that "the Latin language, in the form in which Julius Caesar spoke it, was dead, although some argue it still maintained itself alive in its French, Spanish, English, Italian, Romanian, and Portuguese incarnations."[42] In Akl's view, the French, the Spaniards, the English, and the Italians, continued for many centuries to think of their spoken languages as Latin dialects, "popular, vulgar, and crude *Lahjas*, often referred to in exactly the same devaluative attributes that people use today in reference to our Lebanese language."[43] But, claimed Akl, it took the speakers of these crude and vulgar *Latins* a "titan of the Latin language like Dante,"[44] and fearless respected "national poets" like Pierre-François de Ronsard and Joachim DuBellay,[45] to persuade them that their spoken languages must no longer be referred to as mere vulgar variants of another eloquent language, but rather that they were high-languages of culture in their own right.[46] Ac-

cordingly, in Akl's view, today's so-called Arabic dialects are no different from medieval "Latin dialects," bastardized and corrupted dialects—"if such devaluatives sooth the sensitivities of Arabists"—but dialects that "the mother-language [MSA] no longer recognizes as her offspring."[47] After all, without the benefit of MSA—a "Latin" in Aklian terminology—or better yet, without the benefit of an English *lingua franca*, the Arabs of today would be deaf, dumb, and alien to each other's "dialects," in Akl's view. Still, this evidence was inadequate for Akl. The assertion that the Lebanese spoke a transformed and grotesque Arabic (distorted by many centuries of popular use, and inflected by phonologies and accent residues of an older ancestor born of another culture, accustomed to different sounds, and adapted to different syntactic habits) still smacked of a mitigated "Arabization." Nothing short of a blunt separation of demotic Lebanese from literary Arabic was acceptable to Akl after 1954. And if an affinity between the two languages were apparent—that is, if "users of MSA and 'Arabic dialects' [were] attuned to the Lebanese language, [. . .] this was due to Lebanese influences and contributions to those speech forms, not to any kind of direct parentage or kinship."[48] The dichotomous classification of Arabic as "dialectal" and "literary" was faulty in Akl's view, and the ouster of this "fallacy" from the Lebanese collective consciousness necessitated "scientific" evidence, not mere analogies to Latin and Romance, and certainly not mere wishful musing.[49]

WHY A LEBANESE LANGUAGE?

The period between 1930 and 1950 coincided with an era of romanticism in Lebanese literature where the cult of national languages and literatures with ideological and national messages was at its apogee. Lebanese journals of opinion, philological studies, dailies, as well as archeological reviews and literary studies, were all replete with articles alluding to some sort of a Phoenician-Lebanese cultural and linguistic genealogy.[50] This was also a period of political upheaval where a Lebanese "Araboid" was contrived and finalized in a National Pact that (against the will of one-half of the Lebanese, but with the full support of the other half) proclaimed Lebanon's "Arab face."[51] And so, in those times, a rediscovery or communion with an authentic Lebanese language would have been de rigueur, as a complement to a newly resurrected Lebanese nation, and as added confirmation of cultural *Lebanonness* in a state quickly "rediscovering" an imputed Arabness.[52] Thus, Saïd Akl's initiative complemented and gave stronger footing to his era's nationalist affirmations. And so, expression of the national/Lebanonist feelings became more relevant and began having

more resonance and legitimacy when the method of conveyance became a resilient, timeless, authentic, Lebanese language.

It should be noted that the French language, although widely used in Lebanon during the era of the French Mandate, remained the domain of certain intellectual and social elites and small literate segments of Lebanese society. But the same was equally true of MSA, which was read, written, and understood (in varying degrees of proficiency) only by those who had received formal education and training in its rudiments.[53] Conversely, a considerable segment of Lebanese society was equally alien to MSA as it was to French.[54] Consequently, a significant number of Lebanese nationalist slogans and writings, whether expressed in Arabic or in French, remained esoteric and incomprehensible to those who didn't know either language.[55] Thus, Saïd Akl's national/linguistic campaign, and his maneuvering to standardize the vernacular use would move the expression of national feelings from the realm of the learned and academic, to a popular domain accessible and comprehensible to the average Lebanese.

This has been Saïd Akl's main argument from the outset: first, that a people's common (popular, vulgar, colloquial, vernacular, demotic) language is its most appropriate and its most effective tool for cultural development and intellectual growth; second, that the use of an arcane literary language (namely MSA) was a sure path to cultural stagnation and intellectual atrophy.[56] From this central philosophy emerged Akl's dedication to the promotion of a spoken language (as official language) and the elaboration of a standardized writing method (for fixing that spoken/living national language in written form). From this perspective, Saïd Akl saw himself as Lebanon's Dante, Chaucer, Ronsard, and Joachim DuBellay.[57] In fact, Saïd Akl's *Lebanon: Dilemmas and Strengths* made several references to Alighieri Dante's fourteenth-century *La Divina Comedia*, and strove to compare Dante's decision to write in his native "Florentine dialect" to Akl's own efforts to intellectualize and codify the "Lebanese dialect."[58] Oblivious to the social, political, and religious conditions that might forestall the success of his own linguistic reform project, Akl seemed intent on exaggerating the analogies between Arabic and Latin (and on inflating the self-ascribed resemblance between himself and Dante).[59] In fact, eschewing any modicum of humility, Akl never tired of reminding his interlocutors (and his readers) of the striking similitude between his own linguistic "revolution" and those of Dante, DuBellay, and Ronsard before him.[60]

Never mind that neither Saïd Akl, nor any of his disciples, had yet produced a literary masterpiece of *Divine Comedy* caliber to actuate a collective defection to the "Lebanese language."[61] More importantly, Saïd Akl seemed oblivious to the social and political conditions that may have

contributed to the success of the dialects of Tuscany, Val de Loire, or Castile, and their ultimate transformation respectively into Italian, French, and Spanish. He believed that the Latin paradigm could be duplicated for MSA, and that the cultic significance of Arabic could be inhibited. Akl seemed also heedless of another obstacle to his project. The Arabic language of the twentieth century had already become codified and standardized through the media, the printing press, and the accessibility of public education (where the use of MSA still outpaced all of the other languages currently in use in Lebanon, and elsewhere in the Middle East, demotic vernaculars, French, English, Armenian, Syriac, etc.). And although the use of vernacular as a spoken medium was still more prevalent and popular, MSA was also being demystified and popularized throughout Lebanon. Furthermore, in a religiously divided country such as Lebanon, there was no doubt that an eventual ouster of Arabic would be viewed as a religiously motivated (anti-Muslim, anti-Arab) program. Still, Saïd Akl remained undaunted in his drive to codify his Lebanese language and his attempt to strip his movement from its supposed religious trappings.

Akl was aware that the greatest standardizer of languages was setting them in writing. That is why the introduction of a simple vocalic script was so crucial to his reform. It is doubtful that he had innovated the "Aklian" script simply to inhibit the stagnation of Arabic (or to jumpstart a new Arabic intellectual renaissance). The Aklian script's main aim was the codification of a vernacular language. It is no great surprise that Dante, DuBellay, Chaucer, and Ronsard were recurrent names in most of Akl's lectures and articles. In his view, had Dante not written the Divine Comedy in his native Tuscan dialect, it would never have been codified and standardized, and the Italian language would never have seen the light of day. In fact, according to the Norwegian sociolinguist Einar Haugen, national impulses such as Akl's are not uncommon in the history of languages, or in the history of dialects that succeeded in becoming recognized languages.[62] Haugen argued that reform movements, such as the one undertaken by Akl, are often attributed to one, dedicated lone warrior, not to well-organized political programs.[63] Writing in 1966, on a topic completely unrelated to Akl's or to the Lebanese language issue, Haugen argued that lone language reformers, often being members of a "group whose language [was being] neglected, [have] more than purely intellectual motivations for establishing the existence of their language," even though they might feign altruistic intellectual considerations.[64] Haugen further wrote that the impulses that often motivated people such as Saïd Akl, stemmed from a need for recognition and liberation of the symbol of their national distinctness—that is, the language for which they seek acceptance and confirmation.[65] And like Saïd Akl, Haugen cited Dante, Chaucer, Luther, and DuBellay in reference to such lone language reform-

ers and innovators. That is perhaps why Saïd Akl remains determined in his struggle to forge a place of honor for the Lebanese language, in spite of the levity and ridicule with which he is faced by the keepers of the Arabic language and the Arabist canon. He remains confident that even one dedicated upholder of "the truth," even if forlorn, will eventually prevail. That is why Saïd Akl had no compunctions in comparing himself to the above-mentioned advocates and "creators" of Italian, English, German, and French. Like them, Akl aimed at becoming a model (for imitation) and a trendsetter, not a "language-police" enforcer—in the tradition of Sati' al-Husri and Arab nationalists. That is why he scoffed at the idea of instituting linguistic policies to propagate vernacular Lebanese and promote it into a "prestige" language.[66] In his view, an unbridgeable chasm already existed between MSA and the spoken idiom in Lebanon, and no linguistic policy would be able to inhibit the will of the users of demotic languages.[67] That is why Akl's aim remained mainly to help remove the stigma attached to the use of vernacular Lebanese as a literary language, not muscle it into people's lives.

In this context, in the early 1960s, Saïd Akl and a group of cohorts established the World Vintage Books publishing house. Under this series, Akl's group would set out to translate and publish some of the classics of world literature in Lebanese. World Vintage Books publishing thus embarked on a mission to prove two critical points. First, that the Lebanese people were now capable of fixing their most intimate feelings and thoughts in writing (and in vernacular, as opposed to the traditional MSA or French); and that the lexical richness, receptivity, and flexibility of the Lebanese dialect (reflecting the cultural adaptability and vitality of a timeless Lebanese culture and language) would now make the likes of Lamartine, Shakespeare, al-Mutanabbi, Dostoyevsky, Socrates, Homer, Camus, and Proust—in addition to the Bible and the Koran—available in Lebanese translation.[68] Thus, Akl's infamous admonition that it was no longer acceptable for anyone to denigrate the Lebanese language, "that receptacle of a people's culture and history," by designating it in a label intended for another people's language [Arabic], was now codified in written Lebanese form.[69]

Still, Saïd Akl maintained an avowed reverence for MSA, all the while remaining implacable in his advocacy for demotic Lebanese. In fact, he never completely relinquished writing in Arabic, even as he continued versifying and publishing in dialectal Lebanese and French. He spent the entire decade of the 1990s writing a weekly column in the Arab-Nationalist (Lebanese daily) *al-Safir*, where he rarely missed an opportunity to make the case for his "Lebanese language," in MSA, and to an audience traditionally hostile to his doctrines. His continued use of MSA actually proved beneficial to the cause of Lebanese nationalism and the Lebanese language.

It validated his claim that MSA and "vulgar" (dialectal) languages were actually separate and independent competencies, none of which can replace, subvert, or act as a substitute for the other.[70] Each of *Fus-ha* and *'Aamiyyas*, each of the MSA and the Lebanese languages had its own structural, syntactic, phonological, lexical, and inflectional specificity, beauty, and poetics, and each was a language in its own right, worthy of being written and used in its appropriate time and space.

Although hard to believe in view of the firebrand Lebanonism he advocated, Saïd Akl's attachment to MSA, even as a "hard-liner" of demotic Lebanese, cannot be disputed. Through a literary career spanning almost a century, Saïd Akl never muzzled, or tried to reduce his creativity in Arabic, although he did intersperse his Arabic language output with sporadic irruptions of French and (although at more regular intervals) sparse creations in Lebanese.[71] He did after all make use of both demotic and literary[72] throughout his career, and he continues to this day writing and publishing in Arabic. But it is interesting to note that his Arabic poetry and prose are often hued with "dialectal" Lebanese expressions, which is why his poetry is often described as lexically esoteric, incomprehensible, or at least difficult for the average Arabic reader, the reason being not the actual difficulty of Akl's language, but rather his expansive use of "foreign" (Lebanese) words in essentially Arabic texts. Saïd Akl did not shun Arabic in order to give exposure to the Lebanese vernacular. Nor did he recoil from the use of the Lebanese dialect in deference to Arabic (or French.) His aim was to treat all of his "literary mediums" on an equal footing, as separate and distinct mediums, to be sure, but each with its own grandeur, poetics, and genius, and each independent from the other, as French is independent from Italian.[73] In the end, Akl appeared to have succeeded in his endeavor, not necessarily by having seduced Muslim Lebanese into espousing his Lebanonism (although many of them did not), but by changing attitudes at the grassroots, without having had recourse to burdensome (and often deleterious) linguistic policies.

After having tested a variety of tactics for the promotion of his linguistic Lebanonism, Akl finally opted for separation (between Arabic and Lebanese). Let us remember that his initial strategy aimed simply at reforming literary Arabic, arguing that the language had become corrupt and had to be replaced by its living spoken variants (Lebanese vernacular for Lebanon, Egyptian vernacular for Egypt, Iraqi vernacular for Iraq, etc.). Ultimately, as he was dismissed as one plotting the assassination of Arabic,[74] Akl changed approaches and simply began advancing the claim that Lebanese was a language in its own right.[75] Charting his own defense, Akl often argued that he wielded Arabic and Lebanese with the same dexterity and skill with which he wielded French, Hebrew, and

Greek.[76] Consequently, in his view, Arabic should be made to feel as invulnerable to the popularity of the Lebanese language in Lebanon, as it is invulnerable to the prevalence of French, Armenian, English, Syriac, or any other language currently in use on Lebanese soil.[77] He argued that "each language [Arabic, Lebanese, and French among others] has its purpose and its role in Lebanese society, and each has its splendor and its genius. [. . .] They [the keepers of Arabic] shouldn't be afraid of us" he said, "unless, of course, they are convinced that their language is no longer a language of life, and that it has become an inadequate conveyor of modernity, and are therefore fearful of the vitality of superior or competing neighboring languages."[78]

Akl actually pushed his argument further, and claimed to be among the major defenders of the Arabic language in Lebanon, just as he was the unconditional proponent of a Lebanese language.[79] He argued that the use of Arabic should be considered an element of pride for the Lebanese, and so should it be nurtured, modernized, and perfected by them.[80] Akl was quick to add that this has always been the habit of the Lebanese, since time immemorial.[81] But he never cowered from adding that, although the Lebanese should be hospitable toward the Arabic language, so should they remember that it remains an acquired foreign language in their midst, extrinsic to Lebanon, alien to its nature, and a transitory language of an imperial enterprise.[82] And so, by the simple gesture of extending a warm reception to the Arabic language, Akl was clearly setting the boundaries of kinship and the protocols of association between Lebanese and Arabic. He was in fact treating Arabic with the same deference bestowed on any other language in use in Lebanon, declaring it as relevant (or irrelevant) to the Lebanese identity as French, English, Syriac, or Armenian.[83] In fact, in his *Ecce Libanus*, a Lebanese "constitution" he drafted in the late 1980s, Saïd Akl posited that, although not a spoken language, Arabic enjoyed the same status as any other from the number of "foreign languages currently in use in Lebanon."[84] Therefore, it was Lebanese inasmuch as it was in use (under one form or another) in Lebanon.[85] On the other hand, like Lebanon's other languages (except demotic Lebanese, which was of course a sui generis according to Akl) Arabic was not a Lebanese creation, but an assimilated alien idiom.[86]

In spite of all the drudgery to separate the Lebanese vernacular from Arabic, Saïd Akl was in reality among a very small number of Lebanese intellectuals who could boast being a rampart for Arabic, while at the same time championing the efflorescence and independence of the Lebanese language.[87] He claimed that "the genius and the beauty of each of Lebanon's languages, dwelt in the way in which its users adapted them to their needs"; and so, the genius of Koran dwelt in the splendor of the Arabic language in which it was written; the beauty of Shakespeare's

writing style was inherent to the English language he helped shape; and the beauty of Charles Baudelaire and Marcel Proust were characteristics of the French language they each used."[88] Akl used the same argument to praise the dialectal Egyptian used by Mahmood Bayram al-Tunsi, Lewis 'Awad, Tawfiq 'Awwan, and Ahmad Fouad Najm. Thus, each of Lebanon's languages had its province, its genius, and its audience. And each was, in Akl's estimation, a prestige language in its own right. Consequently, Akl argued that MSA had to be maintained in its stature in Lebanon. But this, he thought, didn't mean allowing MSA to replace Lebanon's national idiom, or allowing it to assimilate, or even dominate or degrade Lebanon's demotic language. In his rationale, just as the French language was prevented from impinging on the use of MSA in Lebanon, so should the Arabic language not be allowed to infringe on Lebanon's native language.[89]

Thus, just as he had earlier attempted to dissociate himself from the bickering of "Phoenicianizers and Arabizers," the new Saïd Akl was now attempting to paint himself in the image of neither defender, nor offender, of either Arabic or Lebanese. Why? Because a now mature and seasoned Akl refused to indict either language, or level charges against either one of them. As a speaker of "Lebanese" he no longer felt inferior to the Arabic language, and therefore no longer exhibited a need for ridiculing it or laboring for its ouster from Lebanon's national life. And by placing MSA on equal footing with vernacular Lebanese, Akl was "normalizing" his national language, as was he symbolically affirming the presence of a separate and confident Lebanese nation—that didn't need the erasure of others to prove its own vitality.

After the "normalization" of a national language, Akl was now ready to embark on its standardization. This project would entail devising an alphabet (and the fixing of the language's orthography), introducing a new vocabulary (either through loan words or neologisms) to express modern concepts that were previously conveyed through foreign (mainly French) idioms, and finally fixing one regional "Lebanese" variant into an acceptable national standard.[90] Akl would set out to execute this three-layered project not by enforcing a coherent linguistic policy, but by inundating Lebanese society via publications, books, newspaper articles, public conferences and interviews, school visits and lectures, and television and radio appearances.[91] No wholesale defections to "Lebanese" have yet been registered in Lebanon, but a fundamental modification in the Lebanese' attitude toward their spoken language can be widely felt, and an alertness to what constituted an Arabic language and what is viewed to be Lebanese is noticeable within large segments of Lebanese society.

NOTES

1. Akl, *Ecce Libanus*, V.

2. Akl, *Interview*. See also the article "Netruk Ba'a l-'Arabi" ("Enough Already with the Arabic Language"), in *Lebnaan* (year IX, number 433, Friday, August 10, 1984), 1.

3. Akl, *Interview*.

4. Akl, *Interview*. See also "Theatre," in *Al-Mashreq*.

5. Akl, *Interview*. Fouad Efrem-Boustany and Anis Freyha, two of Lebanon's preeminent linguists, seem to corroborate Akl's claims. See Boustany's "La trace du Phénicien Ugaritique dans le parler Libanais," in *Mélanges de l'Université Saint-Joseph* (tome XLIX, Beirut, 1975–1976), and in *Studia Libanica* (Editions al-Da'irah, Beirut, 1986), 69–73. See also Anis Freyha's *Concerning the Arabic Language and Some of Its Issues* (Editions al-Nahar, Beirut 1966), and *Al-Lahajaatu wa Usluubu Diraasatiha* [Dialects, and the Methodology for Studying Them] (Editions Dar el-Jeel, Beirut, 1989).

6. Déhdéh, "Evolution de la Nation Libanaise," 15.

7. The analogy between Lebanon and Switzerland, whether geographical, topographical, economic, or linguistic, was one of Michel Chiha's most celebrated boasts about Lebanese particularism.

8. Corm, *La montagne inspirée*, 103–4.

9. Corm, *La montagne inspirée*, 105–6.

10. Corm, *La montagne inspirée*, 101.

11. Corm, *La montagne inspirée*, 101.

12. Correspondence with Gilbert Khalifé.

13. See *If Lebanon Could Speak*, 7

14. Akl, *If Lebanon Could Speak*, 7.

15. Akl, *Interview*. Traces of this argument of Akl's can be found in Henri Lammens's "Les Fondements Historiques de la Nationalité Syrienne."

16. Corm, *La montagne inspirée*, 13, 25, 39.

17. See a list and details of Saïd Akl's works in *Missa Solemnis* and *Yactariim*. See also "*To the Ends of the Universe*" in *If Lebanon Could Speak*. Like Corm's *La montagne inspirée*, *If Lebanon Could Speak* was perhaps "translated" from some emotional or yearned for "Lebanese Language" that may have only been part of some national fantasy. The only source showcasing *If Lebanon Could Speak* in the "Lebanese Language" was Akl's newspaper *Lebnaan*. The first installment was published in the November 29, 1985 issue (Volume XI, Number 497), 3.

18. See *Lebnaan*, numbers 505–93 (Vol. XI–XIII).

19. Corm, *La montagne inspirée*, 105–6.

20. Corm, *La montagne inspirée*, 105–6.

21. Saïd Akl, *If Lebanon Could Speak.* See especially the stories entitled "To the Ends of the Universe," 299, 301, 302, 304, 308, and "The Heart of God," 126, 130.

22. Akl, *Interview*. The short stories of *If Lebanon Could Speak* are required reading in the Lebanese official curriculum, for classes ranging from History, to Arabic Literature, to Social Studies and Civic Education.

23. Akl, *If Lebanon Could Speak*, 9–11.

24. "The Lebanese Universe" is a translation of the Aklian coinage "Le Monde du Liban" (lit. "the World/Universe of Lebanon"), in reference to the Lebanese Diaspora.

25. Saïd Akl, *Lebanon: Dilemmas and Strengths*. A lecture delivered at the Cénacle Libanais on March 1, 1954, 264–65. See also Akl's *Future of the Elite*, second revised edition (Beirut: Noblesse, 1991), 184–86.

26. Akl, *Lebanon: Dilemmas and Strengths*, 264–65.

27. Akl, *Lebanon: Dilemmas and Strengths*, 264–65.

28. Akl, *Lebanon: Dilemmas and Strengths*, 264–65.

29. Akl, *Lebanon: Dilemmas and Strengths*, 264–65. Writing in 1937, Akl argued that "not only did the Arabic language have no traces in Lebanon prior to 300 years ago," but there was barely an era in Lebanon's history when her sons and daughters were not at least bilingual. The studies of Anis Freyha, Michel Feghali, and Fouad Ephrem-Boustany corroborate this deeply entrenched view, which is still pronounced in modern Lebanon. See Jabbour Abdelnoor's 1966 *Etude sur la Poésie Dialectale au Liban* and Freyha's *Al-lahajaatu wa Usluubu Diraasatiha* and *Fi l-lughati l-'Arabiyyati wa Ba'du Mushkilaatiha* (all works previously cited).

30. This argument became one of the major *causes célèbres* of Arabophone Lebanese intellectuals. Anis Freyha studies this theme with much detail in his *Dialects and Methods for Their Study* (Dar al-Jeel, Beirut, 1989), 89–93, and in his *A Dictionary of the Names of Towns and Villages in Lebanon* (Librairie du Liban, Beirut, 1972), XVI–XXII. So does Michel Feghali and a number of Melchite, Maronite, and Assyrian clergymen in the early 1920s begin giving Lebanese "dialectology" more prestige than it had previously enjoyed.

31. Akl, "Theatre," 41–43. In fact, in this 1937 article, Akl openly uses a trademark Cormism (from Charles Corm's 1933 *La montagne inspirée*) claiming that "all the languages that the Lebanese speak today [. . .] feel as if we have molded them [. . .] and presented them in a Lebanese face." In 1954 Taha Hussein was making similar allegations (of kinship to Greek and Latin) with regards to "demotic" Egyptian. But he couched this linkage in a vitriol against the Egyptian dialect and a panegyric of MSA. Of course, this was a mellowed and battered Taha Hussein. In 1932, he was dismissed from his position as Dean of Arts at Cairo University, perhaps as a reaction to his scandalous 1926 book on pre-Islamic Arabic poetry, in which he had suggested that *Jahiliyya* (that is pre-Islamic) poetry was perhaps a post-Islamic forgery.

32. Akl, "Theatre," 41–43. See also Akl's "Al-Shi'r al-Lubnaani fi l-Lugha l-Faransawiyya" [Francophone Lebanese Poetry], in *Al-Mashreq*, 385.

33. Akl, *Lebanon: Dilemmas and Strengths*, 264–65.

34. Akl, "Theatre," 41–43.

35. Akl, *Interview*.

36. See Kees Versteegh's *Pidginization and Creolization,* 133–38; "There is an unmistakable similarity between the process by which Arabic 'became' the modern dialects, and the process by which Latin 'became' the Romance languages [. . .] these popular varieties are] often identified with Vulgar Latin, the name that is usually given to written testimonies which range from inscriptions to texts written by illiterate authors." The French sociolinguist Louis-Jean Calvet concurs in his *La Guerre des Langues et les Politiques Linguistiques* (Hachette Litterature, Paris,

1999), 7, "[. . .] les langues se sont transformées [au point] que certaines en ont absorbé d'autres (les Français parlent aujourd'hui latin, mais un latin qui a vingt siècles d'âge et qui est marqué par un substrat germanique, par le parler de nos ancêtres les Gaulois), que certaines se sont fondues (comme le français et le saxon pour donner l'anglais) et que certaines enfin ont disparu ou sont en voie de disparition." See also Abu Khaldun Saati' al-Husri's 1955 Introduction to Anis Freyha's *Dialects and Their Teaching Methodology*, 5–10. In this Introduction, al-Husri, the recognized spiritual father of Linguistic Arabism, acquiesced in the reality that what is commonly referred to as Arabic dialects have in fact become languages in their own right. . . . Of course, his remedy calls for the forced propagation of Literary Arabic as a spoken language (which is in itself resignation to the vitality of the "dialects," and the atrophy of formal Arabic).

37. Calvet, 7.

38. Calvet, 7.

39. Akl, *Interview*.

40. Akl, *Lebanon: Dilemmas and Strengths*, 264–65.

41. Akl, *Interview*.

42. Akl, *Interview*.

43. Akl, *Lebanon: Dilemmas and Strengths*. See also *Lebnaan*.

44. Dante is one of Akl's sublime examples of the language reformer and "national architect" he intended to become. He quotes him frantically (both in writing and in his ubiquitous appearances in Lebanese broadcast media outlets). Akl also ceaselessly relates Dante's dispute with the *Latin* establishment of his time over the issue of using the Florentine dialect as a writing medium (and his decision to write the *Divine Comedy* in the Tuscan idiom, "which is of course today's Italian." Akl *Interview*).

45. Ronsard and DuBellay were sixteenth-century "troubadours" and founders of *La Pléiade*; a circle of "French" poets who popularized and ennobled the art of versifying in the "French dialect" as opposed to the then prevalent "literary Latin."

46. See Calvet's colorful illustration, 138–39, where he seems to lend scientific support to Akl's basic argument. Calvet says, "When I give my lectures in Linguistics at the Sorbonne, or when I buy my pack of cigarettes at the corner café, I am in fact speaking in Latin, just as the customer who orders a 'tapas' in one of Barcelona's barrio chino bars is speaking in Latin. The same applies to the fisherman selling his cod on a beach in Portugal, or the prostitute soliciting a client on the streets of Naples." Calvet argues that today's accepted wisdom drives us to rightly maintain that the protagonists of his example were actually speaking four different languages: French, Catalonian, Portuguese, and Neapolitan. But in the same vein, Calvet maintains that his illustration does not take away from the fact that French and Spanish languages *are* Latin nonetheless, and that he, the Portuguese fisherman, the Catalonian barfly, and the prostitute of his story were, unbeknownst to them, actual speakers of Latin. But theirs was a grotesque Latin, "deformed by fifteen centuries of popular use and abuse, vocalized by throats accustomed to different sounds and adapted to different syntactic habits." This analogy between the Arabic and the Latin languages is refined in Joshua Blau's *The Renaissance of Modern Hebrew and Modern Standard Arabic: Parallels and Differences in the Revival of*

Two Semitic Languages (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 3, 6, 7, 10, and 12. Besides arguing that Arabic is not a "living tongue," Blau maintains that "the gap between MSA and the dialects widened so much that one may compare, *mutatis mutandis*, the language situation of mediaeval Arabic with that of mediaeval Latin, the literary vehicle of mediaeval Europe, and the Arabic dialects to the Romance vernaculars."

47. Akl, *Interview*.

48. Akl, *Interview*.

49. Akl, *Interview*.

50. See Freyha's *Dialects and the Methodology for Studying Them*; *Concerning the Arabic Language and Some of Its Issues*; and *A Dictionary of the Names of Towns and Villages in Lebanon*; Lammens's "L'Evolution Historique de la Nationalite Syrienne," in *La Revue Phenicienne*, 205–7, as well as his various articles in *Al-Mashreq* treating of issues of etymology and Lebanon's language. See also *Al-Mashreq*'s "Syriac Remnants in the Libano-Syrian Dialect," by Father Joseph Hobeika, July 1939, 290–300; "The Question of Alphabet in the Turkic Languages," by Father Henri Lammens, February 1928, 120–27; "Vocalic Alphabet and Karshunisms," by Father Mermerjy, February 1929, 183–86; and the body of literature completed by Father Michel Feghali (works already cited), in addition to Fouad Ephrem-Boustany and Saïd Akl's articles in *Al-Mashreq* from the late 1920s to the mid-1930s.

51. See Naccache's *Deux Negations ne Font pas une Nation*.

52. Naccache, *Un Rêve Libanais*.

53. Although not all Lebanese francophones of the early twentieth century wielded Arabic with the same ease as French, Lebanese intellectuals who used Arabic as their language of literary and intellectual expression, were most probably eloquent francophones as well. Arabic literacy was more often than not pursued and attained at French-Catholic missionary institutions (with one marked Anglophone-Presbyterian exception), where although the Arabic language was vigorously cultivated, French remained the primary language of instruction. Joseph el-Sawda, a staunch Maronite and a Lebanese nationalist, functioned with native proficiency in French, but his literary and intellectual output were in Arabic. El-Sawda relates being whacked with a ruler on the tips of his fingers (by Father Louis Cheikho, rector of USJ in the early 1900s) because of his poor performance in Arabic grammar). So, not only were Lebanese students of French institutions expected to study Arabic, they were expected to excel in it; and some of them, like El-Sawda and Saïd Akl did, although they kept a special affection for French.

54. On a personal level, both my grandmothers were illiterate but spoke their Lebanese vernacular. They were unable to listen to and understand radio programs and broadcast news in MSA.

55. See MAE, vol. 378 (Carton 436, Dossier 1) for an assessment of Lebanese candidates to the high-school exit examination (Baccalauréat) from 1922 to 1931. The major areas of concentration in the Lebanese Baccalaureate comprised six sections under the French Mandate: Greek and Latin, Latin and Natural Sciences, Latin Language, Natural Sciences, Philosophy, and Mathematics. In a December 10, 1922 memo from Beirut, addressed to the French Minister of Public Education and Fine Arts, there was a proposal by the French Public Education Advisor, for the inclusion of Arabic as a field examination. But the advisor, Mr. Jules Drach,

warned that candidates to that particular field examination had to, beforehand, "*acquérire une culture dans une langue qui n'est pas leur langue maternelle, ce qui éxige un effort tout particulier*" [the candidates to the Arabic language field exam had "to acquire [beforehand] a general education in a language that wasn't their mother tongue, which necessitated extra efforts on their part." Also, an inspection of Lebanese press clippings in MAE, vols. 294 and 525, covering the period of 1928 to October 1931, gives a devastating outline of the low standards of Arabic used in print. In fact, if judged by today's standards, Lebanese media Arabic would be totally unacceptable and utterly unrecognizable and incomprehensible to the average twenty-first-century Arabic reader. Media Arabic then, was perhaps closer to vernacular than it was to acceptable standard Arabic.

56. See Akl's "Dilemmas and Strengths," as well as *Al-Mashreq*'s "Francophone Lebanese Poetry," and "Theatre."

57. Gilbert Khalifé, "On the Heels of History," in *Lebnaan* (Beirut, Friday, June 1, 1984), Volume IX, number, 3.

58. See Akl's *Dilemmas and Strengths*.

59. See Gilbert Khalifé's "On the Heels of History," in *Lebnaan*.

60. Khalifé "On the Heels of History," and Akl *Interview*.

61. Akl's literary output, directed at Arabophone readers, had perhaps surpassed Dante's. But he hadn't yet produced a Dante-like work in the Lebanese dialect when he began comparing himself to the latter.

62. Einar Haugen, *Language Conflict and Language Planning* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1966), 12–13.

63. Haugen, *Language Conflict*, 12–13.

64. Haugen, *Language Conflict*, 12–13.

65. Haugen, *Language Conflict*, 13.

66. Saïd Akl, *Interview.*

67. Saïd Akl, *Interview*.

68. All of the above works and authors were translated into Lebanese, and published under the World Vintage Books series between 1960 and 1973. The project continues to this day, although most books published in vernacular and in the Lebanese script became, in recent years, original works. See Sati' al-Husri and Georges El-Hage for their enthusiastic acclaim of the lexical richness, receptivity, permeability and syntactic flexibility of the "Yaammiyya [dialectal] languages"; in fact, in his Forward to Anis Freyha's *Dialects, and the Method for Studying Them*, Sati' al-Husri does use the expression "'ammiyya languages" (al-Lughaat al-'ammiyya), instead of the customary devaluative al-Lahajaat al-'ammiyya (or 'aammiyya dialects.)

69. The reference here is to Arabic. See Said Akl's *Lebanon: Dilemmas and Strengths*.

70. Akl, *Interview*.

71. Most of Akl's dialectal works of poetry can be found in musical form and in popular songs (performed by the likes of Fayrouz, Majda el-Roumi, and many others). Transcripts of political speeches, conferences, and lectures, can be found in some of the Cénacle Libanais and Université Saint-Esprit publications. (See Akl's "The Grandeur of Phoenician City-States, The Foundation of Lebanese Nationalism," in *Les Dimensions du Nationalisme Libanais;* Les Fondements Historiques d'un

Humanisme Libanais; Le Liban et l'Homme," in *Cahiers de l'Est* (1945) op.cit.; as well as Akl's articles in the weekly *Lebnaan*, from 1975 to 1989). Although *Lebnaan* began publication in 1975 using the rudimentary presses that produced Akl's World Vintage Books series. However, these presses were inadequate for publishing in newspaper format and in the frequency required for a newspaper. Thus, *Lebnaan* continued publication from 1975 to 1978 in "Lebanese" printed (reluctantly, according to Akl) in Arabic script, until new presses were commissioned and delivered in late 1978, date at which the newspaper began publication in the Aklian script.

72. Although he would argue that both f*usha* and *'amiyyah* are both literary languages.

73. Akl, *Interview*.

74. Akl actually scoffs at such accusations. He admitted to me that "they accuse [him] of trying to assassinate Arabic. [. . .] How can anyone kill a corpse?"

75. Even Sati' al-Husri consented in his 1955 Forward to Anis Freyha's *Dialects and Method of Studying Them*, that "Dialects" should be henceforth referred to as "languages," "and local variants of different Arab countries, 'patois,' [should be] named dialects," 8.

76. Akl, *Interview*.

77. Akl, *Interview*.

78. Akl, *Interview*.

79. Akl, *Interview*.

80. Akl, *Interview*. This image clearly smacks of Henri Lammens and Michel Chiha; see note 51. See also Akl's *The Theatre* in, op.cit. *Al-Mashreq*.

81. Akl, *Interview*.

82. Akl, *Interview*. See also *Ecce Libanus*, op.cit.

83. Akl, *Ecce Libanus*, Art. V.

84. Akl, *Ecce Libanus*, Art. V.

85. Akl, *Ecce Libanus*, Art. V. See also "Theatre."

86. Akl, *Ecce Libanus*, Art. V.

87. Akl, *Interview*.

88. Akl, *Interview*. The first stirrings of this argument were elaborated in *Lebanon: Dilemmas and Strengths*.

89. Rafic Rouhana, "Teach Them! Lebanon," *Lebnaan* (Beirut, Friday, December 2, 1983), 4. See also, in the same issue, Saïd Akl's "Let Us Swap Arabness for Progress."

90. Even the "high" Arabic Akl used in his weekly articles in *Al-Safir*, were interlaced with dialectal expression. As with regards to the "standardization" of the Lebanese dialect, as mentioned earlier, even Damascenes and Palestinians who contributed to the World Vintage Books series did so using a standard "polite" dialect that was more cultivated than Akl's own Zahliote idiom.

91. By the late 1980s, the ubiquitous Akl and "his language" (as the script he devised was referred to) had already entered the consciousness of a large portion of Lebanese society, to such a point that TV and radio news broadcasts (which I witnessed in the late 1990s) were being read in dialectal Lebanese (and not in the customary Arabic that I grew up with). See Mahmoud al-Batal's critique of the Lebanese Broadcasting Company's use of dialectal in its news programming in

"Identity and Language Tension in Lebanon: The Arabic of Local News at LBCI," in Aleya Rouchdy's *Language Contact and Language Conflict in Arabic: Variations on a Sociolinguistic Theme*. Also, Lebanese theatrical adaptations of Shakespeare, Racine, and Molière, which during the early 1960s were presented in MSA, have now switched to "dialectal." Theatre directors and producers do not foresee a reversion to MSA, as audiences are no longer interested in sitting through the artificiality of an MSA comedy or drama.

7



Toward a Lebanese Alphabet, Toward a New Middle East

> Writing is a symbol of the spoken language. [. . .] When a written form is achieved, the result is generally greater stability in the spoken tongue.
>
> Mario Pei, *The Story of Language*

In his discussion of the varieties of language in the modern Middle East, Tapani Harvianien, a professor of Semitic Languages at the University of Helsinki, argued that "although the written language and the language of communication (radio, TV, public speaking) basically represent a common Classical Arabic, only local dialects are spoken in everyday life [. . . and these dialects] differ from the written language approximately as much as Italian differs from Latin."[1] Kees Versteegh on the other hand, one of the Arabic language's leading modern historians, maintained that with certain "dialects" of Arabic, the process of development away from the original language—that is, what he termed "creolization"—had become so pronounced, that one can no longer reasonably speak of a "direct genealogical link between the [original Arabic] and the resulting creole."[2] In the same vein, Harvard University's Wheeler Thackston argued that the languages that Arabs grow up speaking at home are as dissimilar from each other, and as different from Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) itself, as Latin is dissimilar and different from modern English and the Romance languages.[3] A seemingly blasphemous statement for Semitists and Arabists invested in MSA, but a strong validation of Saïd Akl's lifelong claims which run parallel to the above. Akl actually believes that the banalized and normalized habit of devaluing a language, by calling it a dialect (or a colloquial, or a *'amiyya* or *lahja* in the case of Arabic) is

just shoddy linguistics and gross oversimplifications serving ideological predilections, not pedagogical attempts at understanding the intricacies of kinship between different speech forms and vernacular languages in the Middle East.[4] Furthermore, Akl believes that complacence in, and acceptance of such fallacies, are a step toward abdication and submission to Arabist propensities and orthodoxies. Therefore, he often made the claim that if the Lebanese are unable to counter the "travesty that labels their Lebanese language as an Arabic dialect," then they cannot possibly refute the equally pernicious and false allegations of Arabists claiming Lebanon to be an Arab country and a Syrian province.[5]

Still, Saïd Akl believed Lebanon's identity problems to stem not from the Lebanese lacking a coherent corporate identity, or shared memories, or common myths of origin. To the contrary, the trappings of Lebanon's distinct identity were evident in Akl's mind. But he believed the challenges facing that identity to derive from the fact that the modern Lebanese today—like the founders of their modern republic some eight decades ago—were apprehensive of admitting and voicing the truth about their national, cultural, and linguistic specificity.[6] He saw these reservations as an outcome of fear of being ridiculed for claiming a heritage older than that normalized in the Arab or Arabist paradigms. He also believed these compunctions to be the result of "entrenched Phoenicianist, mercantilistic" impulses impelling the Lebanese into destructive self-negation—so as to flatter and mitigate their Arab neighbors and assuage the latter's fear of diversity.[7]

Akl utterly rejected these sorts of non sequitur. He argued that his lifelong engagements on behalf of Lebanon were dedicated to uncovering the truth about its history and identity, without apologies, without concealment, without reservations, and without sugar-coatings. "We shouldn't feel guilty about exulting in our uniquely Lebanese history, culture, and language simply because they deviate from our neighborhood's norms, and make our neighborhood uneasy," he mused.[8] Akl firmly believed that no political points can ever be scored toward the cultural, physical, and political emancipation of Lebanon, and no territorial liberation or restoration of Lebanon's political sovereignty can ever be accomplished before the Lebanese are empowered to overcome the mental occupation, the perversion of their history, and the erosion of their national spirit and consciousness! It is for these reasons that Saïd Akl set out to construct a national identity with very strong linguistic references.

The present chapter, although dedicated entirely to the Aklian "Alphabetic Reform," will still rely on many of the references, and recall many of the arguments advanced by Akl's "Linguistic Lebanonism." For, although Akl's 1961 "official" induction of a Lebanese alphabet as a writing tool of his vaunted, but heretofore unwritten, "Lebanese language," linguistic

Lebanonism was in his view the supreme crystallization and the most concrete and eloquent expression of the Lebanese collective identity. Scriptal or "alphabetic" Lebanonism was, from Akl's standpoint, nothing more than a corollary to the more significant vernacular/linguistic identity that he helped inaugurate. This chapter will attempt to demonstrate how the introduction of a Lebanese script in a separate alphabetic system appreciably distinct from the Arabic script, can become a more powerful symbol of a distinct Lebanese Identity. In other words, claiming that the "Lebanese language" was a separate competency from Arabic might muster more legitimacy if coupled with a distinct and emblematic writing tool. Saïd Akl recognized that he could have shouted himself hoarse about the "Lebanese language's" endogenous nature; no one would have taken his claims seriously so long as this touted "Lebanese language" continued to be written in an Arabic script. Indeed, the "Lebanese *Lahja*" (or dialect) regardless of what Saïd Akl might have chosen to call it, would have remained an "Arabic dialect" in popular perceptions. This may have been a fallacy passed along as a truism as far as Akl and his followers were concerned, but to the overwhelming majority of Middle Easterners—and Lebanese—who grew up speaking a language which they were told was a variant of Arabic, this fallacy was the only truth they knew. That is why this chapter will attempt to show that the introduction of a "Lebanese" script may have been a more important element of Lebanonism than was the attempt to modify the nomenclature and metalanguage used in reference to the "Lebanese dialect." Indeed, upon close examination, we will see that a strong argument might be made in favor of the idea that the introduction of a distinct "Lebanese alphabet" may have acted as a more powerful symbol of Lebanese specificity than the touted "Lebanese language" argument previously thought to be so essential to the Aklian Lebanonism.

Over time, if adopted and institutionalized (as Akl hopes it would), the Aklian script could codify and perpetuate what had perhaps initially originated as a flimsy claim of a whimsical poet; the claim that vernacular Lebanese was an "evolved demotic Phoenician" and not an "Arabic dialect." Only then, and with the passage of time, would what was perhaps, in popular beliefs, a demented chimera, become a truism, ingrained in people's psyche, and akin to the French and Italian languages being to their speakers, not dialects of Latin, but unique outcomes of self-generated French and Italian experiences.

THE WAR OF LANGUAGES

In his lifelong struggle to modify prevalent attitudes and nomenclature with regards to languages and dialects, Saïd Akl became convinced that

inherited wisdom and assumptions can become so safely ensconced in popular beliefs that, over time, it becomes difficult to notice them or question their validity or veracity. Therefore, Akl maintained that if received knowledge was initially false but concealed over time and passed along as a truism, and then perpetuated in people's minds as a truism, then it perforce ends up becoming a truth, even though it had in the beginning been a misconception. Saïd Akl was aware of the reality that in a Muslim Middle East already entranced and overcome by Arab nationalism and its enticing metaphors, the advocacy on behalf of local vernaculars would be a hard sell. Nevertheless, he set out to challenge received notions and Arabizing orthodoxies.

In an almost inane metaphor, Akl illustrated to this author what he termed "the false semantization" of what is commonly referred to as Arabic:

> We all instinctively believe that tomatoes and eggplants are vegetables. This is our received wisdom; tomatoes and eggplants are vegetables. Society tells us so, the marketplace tells us so, the Oxford and Larousse dictionaries tell us so, as do agricultural engineers, botanists and farmers tell us so. And up until very recently, even I, a voracious eater of both tomatoes and eggplants, subscribed to that widely accepted notion, without ever questioning it. Truth is, however, both the tomato and the eggplant are fruits not vegetables (and the eggplant is, more specifically, a berry).[9]

But Saïd Akl's aim from the previous example was evidently not to talk about the principles of botany or the joys of gardening. He was simply trying to make the point that anti-intellectualism can sometimes be so cleverly shrouded in scholarship that it becomes difficult, indeed unthinkable, for commoners not to mistake it for scholarship and an undeniable element of truth. That's what Akl probably meant when he said that "certain assumptions are so entrenched" to the point that people internalize them, normalize them, and accept them as irrefutable universal truth, even though they may in reality be a corruption of the truth. In Saïd Akl's view, it is precisely this sort of dissonance that drove the Lebanese to cast doubt on their uniquely Lebanese identity, and to go out of their way to elude the question of their Lebanese identity, their Lebanese heritage, and their Lebanese language, hastening to melt and dissolve their specificity into the heritage, the identities and languages of others.[10]

Stemming from this stubborn axiom of his, Saïd Akl never surrendered to his interlocutors' "mislabeling" of the Lebanese "language" as an Arabic dialect.[11] This author became witness and victim of Akl's tenacity and absolute devotion to his principles and theories on language. And so, during my first interview with Saïd Akl on May 14, 2000, it became clear to me that an innocent inquiry I had made about whether Akl preferred

we had our talk in "Arabic or French" had evidently rubbed him the wrong way. Indeed, after quickly realizing what I had done, I became concerned that our interview might not go the way I was anticipating. Nevertheless, Saïd Akl remained unflappable and (to my unease) eerily composed.[12] He then noisily drew a deep breath, as if to interrupt—what had seemed to me like—an endless awkward moment of silence, then his oversized right index finger began a serial pounding of the wooden table before him, emitting a crescendo of heavy alarming thuds. Suddenly, as if flashing me a visual "*gotcha!*" his eyes began sparkling in a pixyish smile quickly spilling to his pouting lips. His movements slowed down, and the rhythm of his breathing dwindled to an imperious, placid cadence. This was, I thought to myself, the prelude to the flogging I was about to sustain. He then proceeded in his unfazed and determined (two-hour) refutation of my hapless question: whether he preferred that we spoke in Arabic or in French! "What a dumb question," I thought to myself. We would be speaking neither, as it turned out, because "Lebanese" was the language of choice in the Akl home, as was the case in the rest of his Lebanon. Suddenly, as if to interrupt the volleys of controversy racing through my head, Saïd Akl drew another loud breath, his voice drooped into an intimidating baritone, and he began lecturing me in the essentials of "Lebanese linguistics."

It was evident that my mere allusion to the possibility of "speaking in Arabic" had offended "the father of Lebanon." And in retrospect, I now realize that I had not mentioned the word "Arabic" (in reference to the spoken language) to taunt Saïd Akl or harass him. Nor was my innocent insinuation—that the "Lebanese language" was perhaps an "Arabic" dialect—some unusually curious or uncommon observation, as Akl later reassured me. "We all make that mistake without actually being conscious of the fact that it is a mistake," he told me.[13] He then explained to me how we've all acquired this "bad habit," and how we've all learned to perpetuate that bad habit of referring to our Lebanese language as a form of Arabic, as an Arabic Dialect, as a "*Déérij* as we say in Lebanese."[14]

In Saïd Akl's view, this was so because the Lebanese were simply lazy! They are par excellence Phoenicians! They love cutting corners, and they hate complicated matters. That's precisely why, Akl argued, "our ancestors invented a simple alphabet consisting of twenty-two symbols, rather than having to rely on the thousands of pictorial Hieroglyphs and strenuous Cuneiform of their time!"[15] So, yes, the Lebanese value simplicity and shortcuts, according to Akl. And they don't like to get entangled in complex esoteric linguistic explanations. So they condense, they shorten, they oversimplify, and they call their language an "Arabic Dialect" since everybody else calls it so. And in the process, he continued, they rob their language of its specificity, and they deny it its status

as a prestige Language, which ultimately leads to their own dissolution into the cultural personality of their Arab neighbors, whose language they now think they speak. "And do you know what is the corollary to this levity, this indifference, this oversimplification?" asked Akl. "It's loss of independence! It's subjugation! It's occupation! It's even worse than occupation! It's the nefarious *Anschluss*! It is the complete dissolution of the self into the national personality of the other, of the occupier. And nations that were not conscious of this reality and acquiesced in fusing their languages into those of their occupiers disappeared."[16] Lebanon, argued Saïd Akl, could disappear as a country and as a civilization if it continues to comply with the delusion that it speaks Arabic.

Akl continued, that whenever there is an "occupation" of a certain country, there is an outlined relationship between oppressor and oppressed, between occupier and occupied. It's clearly an unequal, abnormal, tyrannical relationship. But in his estimation, there remains at least a semblance of a "collective" awareness of this abnormality. Where there is occupation, there are two separate, often antagonistic, entities. There are two distinct personalities that are aware of their dissimilarities and division, and even hostility. But with the *Anschluss*, claimed Akl, the occupied is deconstructed and fused completely in the personality of the occupier; he is stripped of his personal effects and his cultural attributes. Said Akl, "when you tell people—and this is not lost on the Syrian—when you tell people that you speak Arabic, you are in essence contributing to your own national disintegration."[17] That's why the issue of national Language was so fundamental to Lebanon's national dynamism, national resurrection, and eventually national liberation, according to Saïd Akl.

My interview with Saïd Akl the national poet and the artisan of Lebanonism revealed to me that Akl the man, despite his advocacy for a single authentic national language, still believed fervently in Lebanon's congenital polyglotism! Like the Young Phoenicians before him, Saïd Akl believed that wielding the languages of the "universe" was a Lebanese vocation. He also believed that since the Lebanese's ancient ancestors began writing and trading, they also began learning, speaking, and perfecting the languages of those with whom they've dealt. This "Lebanese affability and cordiality" was in Akl's view at the heart of the universalist humanist mission of the Lebanese.[18] "Unfortunately" argued Akl, "people today are labeled according to the languages they speak, despite what the textbook definition of the 'nation' tells us."[19] He agreed with his Phoenicianist predecessors that there are many factors in the definition of a nation, least of which was perhaps language. He also believed that although at times language could be an important component of nationhood, that it could facilitate communication between members of the same nation,

it remains nonetheless an unimportant and unnecessary condition for nationhood. Akl even used the same analogies of his francophone Phoenicianist friends, arguing that if language were indeed a decisive criterion for nationhood, countries like Switzerland, Belgium, Ireland, Argentina, and the United States would be nonextant as specific national entities today.[20] Still, Akl firmly believed that nations are nowadays largely defined by the languages they speak. He agreed with the notion that the French are considered (and consider themselves to be) French because of many historical factors. But he still maintained that they were essentially French mainly because they spoke French. He used the same illustration to speak of the "peoplehood" of the Germans, the Italians, the Spaniards, and the Portuguese. He argued that "this [was] how modern Europe [had] taught us to define our legal and cultural personalities."[21] To put it in Akl's biting realism, "we are what we speak:"[22]

> You can try explaining to a Frenchman or an American that you are Lebanese until you run out of breath. You can try telling them that you hail from a 7,000-year-old cultural tradition predating the Arabs by millennia. You can tell them that your Phoenician ancestors conquered the entire Ancient World by seduction and pacifism (without shedding one drop of precious human blood) when the Arabs were still aimlessly roaming their sand oceans. You can tell them that your Lebanese ancestors invented a simple, elegant, writing system (consisting of twenty-two Alphabetic symbols that made all of mankind's subsequent creativity and inventiveness feasible . . .). You can tell them that they did so some 3,000 years before the Arabs had even begun making their bloody entry on the stage of History. . . . You can do all of that, and more (and you would be justified in so boasting . . .). But then you would proceed to demolish that entire lofty historical edifice with a simple slip of the tongue; by simply saying that you speak Arabic, that your native language is Arabic. Then you can kiss your 7,000-year-old proud history goodbye.[23]

Labeling the exquisite, elegant Lebanese language as some sort of a deformed "Arabic" (an Arabic hybrid, a spoken Arabic, or a slang) is a common, albeit noxious, misconception that a lot of Lebanese have learned to normalize and internalize as truth, according to Akl. But he maintained that "speaking Arabic" and being a "Speaker of Arabic" are two of the most obscene linguistic fallacies of our time; fallacies, which in his view, have slowly and insidiously seeped into the mainstream political, cultural, ideological, and linguistic discourse of the twentieth century, and are being perpetuated as truth. "That's why I will forgive you today for referring to my language as Arabic," said Akl. "But you have to promise not to fall into this same trap again." I promised; the interview went on; we struck up a friendship.

We saw that, not unlike the Phoenicianists and Mediterraneanists before him, Saïd Akl too vaunted the uniquely Lebanese multilingualism. However, he also maintained that, in addition to its linguistic plurality, Lebanon indeed possessed a sui generis national vernacular.[24] Therefore, from his standpoint, multilingualism was no longer a valid scheme for Lebanonists to compensate for the absence of a genuine national language. With him multilingualism had rather become part of the accoutrements of being Lebanese, and an extra "national" linguistic accessory. Akl understood very early on during his Lebanonist excursion that his advocacy in favor of a "Lebanese language" would be met with derision, in spite of his stature as one of those who wrote the most notable Arabic during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Therefore, he decided to wage battle on two major fronts. On one front, he aimed to debunk the myths about the Arabic language, and alter the misconceptions about what constituted an Arabic language and what didn't. On the second front, he aimed to standardize the Lebanese vernacular, codify it in written form, and endow with its own alphabet thus defining its originality, its particularism, and its distinction from Arabic.

Like Sati' al-Husri, Saïd Akl believed in the integrative aspects of a national language (albeit he still maintained that language wasn't a precondition for nationhood). His national "policy" was clearly the unification of the Lebanese around a purely Lebanonist national idea whose vector would be an authentic national language. In his view, to institute a distinct national language was to create a national feeling, and ultimately a distinct national State. But before that "Lebanese language" was enabled to become once more the Lebanese vector of a Lebanese ethos, it had to first un-become something it had been in people's minds for so long. Before unifying Lebanon and remedying its irresolute identity, Saïd Akl wanted his national language to cease being referred to as a dialect of Arabic. To reach this goal, a scriptal-alphabetic operation had to be performed. Therefore, the demand that the Lebanese "language" be transcribed in a Latin script and in the Lebanese phonology, syntax, and pronunciation, was answering to a purely political necessity. Akl could have repeated ad nauseam that the aim of his reform was a purely linguistic one and that he never contemplated offending Lebanon's Muslims or Arab nationalists; that would not have diminished anything from the fact that his project was a veritable affront to Arabism and Islam. Alphabetic and linguistic Lebanonism were a clear insurrection against rooted Muslim traditions in the Levant, and a rebellion against prevalent notions that painted the Lebanese and the rest of Levantines as Arabs—and branded the languages they spoke as dialects of Arabic. Thus, in attempting to buttress the foundations of his nation on secular linguistic substructures, Akl earned the suspicion, if not the wrath of a good component of Lebanese society. Indeed, a large

portion of Lebanese Muslims remains ill prepared to relinquish its Muslim and Arab references, and opt for what it regards to be a new and contrived Lebanese identity. The idea of harmony between state, nation, and language, which Akl continues to preach and advocate to this day, has not been able to supersede other primordial religious and parochial loyalties in Lebanon. Indeed, Akl's linguistic-alphabetic Lebanonism has perhaps even accomplished the total opposite of its architect's desired goal. It set the Lebanonists on a collision course with Arabs, Arabists, Arab nationalists and Muslims, within and outside Lebanon. Thus, instead of the love, tolerance, and humanism that Lebanonism was supposed to engender,[25] it bred hatred, xenophobia, and rejection of the other.

It was Akl's lyrical alter ego Cadmus who best ensconced the essence of Lebanonism when he said:

> We are unlike conquerors,/ we descend upon wilderness,/ And render it streams and gardens,/ We pitch cities, we sow ideas in the earth,/ And we move on, setting the example for conquerors to come,/ [. . .] From our tiny homeland, we roam the earth and oceans,/ Scattering our villages, always on fresh new shores,/ We take the universe to task: peoples and destinies,/ And we erect—wherever we go—a brand new Lebanon,/ [. . .] My country, Lebanon, is a covenant!/ It is neither Cedars, nor mountains, or gushing springs,/ My country is love!/ There isn't rancor in true love!/ It is light that doesn't mislead: it is diligence,/ And a hand that spawns beauty and wisdom./ Do not say "My Nation!," and overrun the universe,/ We are neighbors and kinfolk to all of Mankind![26]

So, in a sense, Saïd Akl's nationalist struggles were perhaps genuinely meant to be innocuous, peaceful, and humanistic. Indeed, the entire corpus of his literary work reflected the basic ideas expounded in the *Cadmus* excerpts above: generosity, kindness, and above all love and concern for mankind. But Akl still maintained that certain beliefs, such as the sanctity of Lebanon's perpetuity and cultural specificity, are not negotiable variables. And if a behavior unbecoming of the Cadmusian tenets above should crop up, it would be, in Akl's estimation, an exigency of self-defense and self-preservation. That is why Akl considered the issue of Lebanon's language (and we shall see below, Lebanon's script) indispensable and worthy of defense, even to the detriment of those who opposed and sought to divest it.

THE PAIN AND SHAME OF LEAVING ARABIC

French philologist Adrien Barthélemy argued that the "vulgar Arabic, or the Arabic that is actually spoken today" is not yet a written language,

mainly because to the minds of Easterners the only language that is worthy of being taught and written, is the language of Koran.[27] Barthélemy further claimed that this seemingly curious impulse toward stifling living languages in diglossic societies was not the least peculiar, given that in the Middle Ages there were prohibitions, even in France, against the writing of the French vernacular.[28] This was so, said Barthélemy, due to the fact that writing was reserved only for the intellectual and liturgical language; Latin. Indeed, the 842 A.D *Serments de Strasbourg*, were the first French-Latin (or dialectal French specimen) that was put in writing, in spite of the official Church and State prohibition on writing in vernacular.[29] This event not only contributed to the standardization of a Latin dialect into a French language, it also helped create a new society, an outcome of a long series of circumstances leading up to the birth of a language, a culture, and finally a nation.

Could this be the reason inhibiting the adoption of a script to codify the various Arabic "languages"? Could a successful scriptal Lebanonism signal the death of the Arabic language and the withering of the "Arab nation"?[30] Akl certainly believes this could be the case.

Henri Lammens claimed to have suggested to a Young Turkish officer the adoption of the Latin script for Turkish as early as 1908.[31] In fact, Lammens recounts that while working at the Koprulu Effendi Library in Istanbul (a few days following the overthrow of Sultan Abdelhamid in 1908), Nazem Bey, who would become Turkish minister of education in 1918, accosted him with a complaint about the pervasiveness of illiteracy among young Turkish army conscripts.[32] Lammens claims that, while asking for advice, Nazem Bey proceeded to attribute the Turkish linguistic dilemma to the complexity of the Arabic alphabet (with which Turkish used to be written) and its inability to readily and accurately produce the specific sounds of the Turkish language in writing. This is when Lammens suggested the adoption of the Latin alphabet, which Nazem Bey reportedly welcomed with much enthusiasm and claimed to have already been considering.[33] Still, Lammens alleged that Nazem Bey and a number of like-minded Young Turks, although already weighing the idea of the Latin script in earnest and with great enthusiasm (even before Lammens's suggestion), were fearful of the dire consequences that such a radical initiative would have on their Turkish public opinion and their Turkish Muslim establishment.[34] "It is troublesome for Muslims," argued Lammens, "to accept such a substantial change and cultural disruption," which touch one of the central elements of Muslim tradition.[35] Still, Lammens reported that the idea of a Latin script and the reformation of the Turkish alphabet, although not yet acted upon with any degree of seriousness, and still approached with much trepidation and guilt in a Muslim setting such as the Ottoman Empire's, had already made psy-

chological inroads and was already being looked upon positively, even by the early 1860s.[36] Indeed, Lammens claimed that the idea of a scriptal reform had already been mentioned and praised in an Istanbul magazine as early 1863.[37] But at any rate, the Ottoman Academy of Learning had already commissioned two Turkish grammarians, as early as 1851, to begin the process of purging the Turkish language from the predominant Arabic and Persian elements in its grammar, lexicon, and syntax.[38] Out of this endeavor, came a series of Turkish dictionaries and grammar books that stressed the distinct personality of the "Ottoman language," and its specific identity as a "Turkish dialect" and not an Arabized vernacular.[39] Soon thereafter, as Henri Lammens rightly noted in his account, there began to emanate a renewed pride in the Turkish language and a yearning for its authentication and purification. Soon, the appellation "Turkish" no longer carried derogatory connotations as had been the case prior to the end of the nineteenth century.[40] However, this slow movement toward the eventual abrogation of the Arabic script was still strongly opposed by the Ottoman establishment.[41]

In more recent times, it was perhaps in Egypt where the most serious attempts at revamping, indeed "abandoning" the Arabic alphabet—if not abandoning the Arabic language altogether—were made. In fact, long before Saïd Akl and his Lebanonist cohorts, Egypt was already toying with the idea of a linguistic separation from the locus of Arab nationalism, even as early as 1929. Egyptian nationalists like Taha Hussein, Salama Musa, and Tawfiq 'Awwan recognized early on the necessity of fixing their demotic language in a written form if it were to succeed in becoming the linguistic appanage of the Egyptian people, and therefore the marker of their specific identity. Indeed, in a tone and with reasoning reminiscent of Saïd Akl, Tawfiq 'Awwan argued in a *Siyaasa Usbu'iyya* article as early as 1929 that:

> Egypt [had] an Egyptian language, [and] Lebanon [had] a Lebanese language, [and] the Hijaz [had] a Hijazi language; and so forth—and all of these languages [were] by no means Arabic languages. Each of our countries has a language, which is its own possession: so why do we not write it as we converse in it? For the language in which the people speak is the language in which they also write.[42]

This menacing declaration was revealed a mere year following Turkey's Grand National Assembly's imposition of an adapted Latin script for the Turkish language. It is significant because it appears to have been an atavistic manifestation of the linguistic project upon which Saïd Akl would embark a decade later. But 'Awwan's originality wasn't so much in the fact that he advocated the codification of the Egyptian dialect in written form. This impulse was already reflected in the popular poetry and the

literary and journalistic endeavors of the time, whether in Egypt, Lebanon, or elsewhere.[43] So, in this sense, ‘Awwan was hardly an innovator, especially that his allegations made hardly an allusion to an alphabetic "latinization." He was merely defending a prevalent impulse to codify the demotic language in written form. In his view, this was the single most important process that had finalized the separation of the Romance Languages (which were initially devalued as vulgar variants of Latin) from formal Latin. However, the ‘Awwan stand was willing to acquiesce in the adaptation of the Arabic script for the codification of the Egyptian vernacular. His early aim, like that of Saïd Akl, was to advance acceptability for the spoken vernacular as a written language, perhaps paving the way for internalization and normalization as a "national" language, somewhere down the line. But we shall see later that Saïd Akl's campaign, the initial motives of which were very similar to ‘Awwan's, aimed literally at expunging all Arabic traces, whether scriptal or lexical, from the Lebanese dialect. Therefore, not only did Akl reject the analogy of Latin and its dialectal variants (which later became successful and dominant national languages); but as we saw earlier, Saïd Akl went so far as to argue that the Lebanese vernacular was an independent spontaneous endogenous Lebanese generation, and not a creolized Arabic as ‘Awwan was willing to admit in the case of Egyptian. Furthermore, to buttress his claim, Saïd Akl not only set out to codify his Lebanese language in written form, he employed a strategy to conclusively amputate it from any possible linkage with the Arabic language. Thus, although the Lebanese vernacular did benefit from a writing medium (the Arabic script) prior to Saïd Akl, the Aklian scriptal reform sought to provide it with a new form that would visually, and psychologically separate it from the slightest hint of an Arabic kinship. In this sense, Saïd Akl was not only affirming that the Lebanese language was a suitable marker of Lebanese identity and an integrator of the religiously stratified Lebanese society. He was also declaring the Arabic language to be an unsuitable nimbus of Arabhood due to its position as a literary rather than a spoken medium. Still, Tawfiq ‘Awwan was indeed an original in his claim that the languages spoken in Egypt, Lebanon, and the Hijaz were not Arabic but respectively Egyptian, Lebanese and Hijazi. But ‘Awwan's claim was significant also because it reflected a bias of the times, whereby countries like Lebanon and Egypt, with perceived histories predating Islam and Arabism, sought to rekindle their ancient memories with narratives and languages mirroring their perceived aged lineage. And again, it seems as if the few Egyptian intellectuals' timid dabbling with the issue of language and script goaded Akl to pursue the idea to its fruition, given that Egypt's endeavors led to no satisfactory solution.

In 1944, the first serious project in the Arab world, proposing the adoption of a Latin alphabet, saw the break of day at Cairo's Fouad I Arabic Linguistic Society conference. But as was perhaps expected back then, the proposal turned out to be a stillbirth. Therefore, and discounting Turkey's 1923–1928 ambitious and successful linguistic engineering project—which eliminated Arabic from school curricula and introduced a Latin script to replace the Arabic alphabet—the Middle East prior to Saïd Akl was still approaching the issue of reforming the Arabic script with fear, consternation and guilt. Indeed, the best proposals at Cairo's 1944 ALS conference, or at least the ones that were dignified with a brief discussion (before being rejected) were ones which kept with the spirit of the Arabic script.

ABDELAZIZ FEHMI PASHA

In an article published in *al-Mashreq*'s December 1944 issue, Louis Khalil laid open the details of the first "Arabic" alphabetic reform project attempted in the Middle East: the stillborn January 1944 proposal submitted by Abdelaziz Fehmi Pasha at Cairo's ALS Congress (and which was briefly mentioned in chapter 5).[44] Although himself perhaps not a committed opponent of the idea, Khalil felt bound, even in his capacity as an impartial reporter, to feign hostility and voice a—clearly stilted—criticism of Fehmi Pasha's proposal to redraft a new Arabic alphabet. This attitude should illustrate the hesitance, consternation, and guilt with which Arabic language reformers must have approached their topic prior to Saïd Akl (and indeed account for the scorn, friction and outright antipathy that the Aklian project has been encountering ever since its inception in the late 1930s). Indeed, Saïd Akl argued that these prevalent hostile attitudes to projects like his, made his reform all the more necessary and all the more admirable and brave.[45] He claimed that "every great idea begins as an eccentric transgression against received wisdom."[46] "But," he continued, "I am not a frail old-lady to quiver and crumble, and renounce on my noble project, just because the establishment is a feared boogey-man that wants to protect an obsolete language and a defective alphabet."[47] This defiant argument, although vintage Aklian self-adulation, had a certain validity, especially in light of the less-than-flattering fate that befell all those who attempted to tamper with the Arabic language and its alphabet, prior to Saïd Akl. The "Catalogue of Dishonor" in this field indeed contains the names of many erstwhile celebrities of the glamorous universe of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Arabic literature. Names, which due to the audacity of their owners, and due to their disposition or temerity to reform the Arabic language and its script, have completely lapsed

from the consciousness of the average Middle Easterner. Salama Moussa, one of the first feminists and a major voice for socialism and scientific progress in the Middle East, was jailed on and off throughout his life on account of his critical views of Arab societies and his persistent calls for social and linguistic reforms. In the end, he died alone and was all but erased from the collective memory of modern Arabic literature. His only crimes were his criticism of the Arabic language and its obsolete esoteric literature, and his calls for "the creation of modern industry and the adoption of a scientific culture" instead of the backward-looking Arabized Egyptian culture.[48] But Salama Moussa was not alone in his ostracism. So were omitted the literary contributions of Abdelaziz Fehmi Pasha and Henri Lammens from the honor roll of the Arabic *renaissance* movement. Indeed, Henri Lammens was branded a racist, and a "scholar of Islam who wasn't all that fond of Islam and Muslims."[49] Furthermore, Taha Hussein, who was initially an enthusiastic proponent of the replacement of the Arabic language itself (not only its script,) first by Phoenician, and later by an alternate European language, was also cowed into renouncing his earlier calls.[50] That is actually the only reason Taha Husayn still has relevance today in the alcoves of Arabic literature's twentieth-century edifice. The fact that he renounced his early demands, asked for forgiveness, and castigated his early companions who did not express remorse for their transgressions, absolved him from the sins of his youth. In fact, upon close examination of Taha Husayn's pre-1940s output, one can quickly realize how much affinity existed between his convictions and those of Saïd Akl. The only difference was that Husayn had since atoned for his past sins and Akl is still unrepentant. But the resemblance is still striking. For instance, Taha Husayn's belief that Egypt's closest cultural and linguistic connections, since antiquity, and to the present, had been with Greece, Rome, Europe, and the Mediterranean world (and not with the Eastern or the Arab world) have many similitudes to Saïd Akl's own belief that Lebanon is the progenitor of the values that Europe cherishes today.[51] Certainly, by 1940 Taha Husayn was all but compelled into tempering his criticism of Arabic literature, Arabic culture, and the Arabic language. He altogether rescinded his early conviction regarding the revamping of the Arabic alphabet, the use of demotic Egyptian, and the replacement of Arabic by a Mediterranean language, namely Phoenician.[52] His 1932 loss of his position as Dean of the Faculty of Arts at the University of Cairo had obviously brought Taha Husayn back to the fold of the region's conformism. The shame and psychological strain generated by the mere criticism—or the call for the reformation—of the Arabs' cultural, literary and linguistic reference—the Arabic language—can indeed be a powerful defensive mechanism; they generate an effective self-censorship.

Significantly, even Saïd Akl's own brothers-in-arms, defenders of the Aklian script, and many of them, in their own right, celebrities of Lebanese dialectal literature, have opted to continue publishing in the Arabic script, as if to (at least psychologically) dissociate themselves from the blasphemy that their patron saint was committing against the Arabic language (by proposing a progressive alternate alphabet). However, one can argue that Akl himself has also continued writing in the Arabic script, and in the Arabic language, although he claimed to have never spoken Arabic since the mid-1950s. Still, vacillations, misgivings, and consternation have always accompanied the mere mention of "leaving Arabic," ever since the idea began making headlines with the Young Phoenicians.

This explains why, even in 1944, and even as a reporter, Louis Khalil seemed almost intimidated into opening his article (about Fehmi Pasha's alphabetic reform proposal) with a disclaimer. He sounded almost as if apologizing for having dared dignify such a topic with so much as an article (hostile as it may have been to the idea of reforming the "hallowed" Arabic script). Thus, Khalil would inaugurate his article with: "It pains me to write, let alone print, my article under the title above: 'How to Improve Arabic: The Latin Alphabet Project.'" He continued that he "didn't want the reader to suspect that there was a project, or a need, to render the Arabic language more civilized, or even to reform it."[53] Indeed, his long drawn out apology seemed to suggest that "improvement and evolution" were base and ignoble impulses, unbecoming of the noble Arabic language (which, somehow, had to remain static to maintain its purity). Louis Khalil would then go on for almost two pages of unbridled overwrought flattery of the Arabic language, denouncing those who complain about its inefficiency, difficulty, and the complexity of its script and grammar.[54] However, Khalil reserved his most searing commentary to those who dared accuse the Arabic language of decadence and incompetence. Namely, he was critical of those, like Fehmi Pasha and Salama Moussa who argued that the Arabic language was incapable of absorbing the exigencies of modernity and recent scientific discoveries.[55]

Indeed, Khalil's article was perhaps in keeping with the spirit of the tense atmosphere that prevailed at the Fouad I ALS Congress. The Lebanese delegates who attended the meeting, and among them Louis Khalil himself, and Anis Freyha, recounted the rising of a restive wave of vindictive and vitriol the minute Abdelaziz Fehmi Pasha began expounding the proposal suggesting the adoption of a Latin alphabet for writing the Arabic language. The mere bent toward suggesting a "corrective" vis-à-vis the Arabic script seemed to stir emotions uncontrollably, according to Khalil.[56] Indeed, in a hypervirile and proud culture, where self-criticism is not always viewed positively, the semantics used to put forth Fehmi

Pasha's doomed project appear to have repulsed those present, from the outset. Indeed, one can note very little in way of flattery, in a proposal referred to as *"Muqtarah Tarqiyat al-Lugha al-'Arabiyya wa Tasyiiriha ma' Muqtadayaat al-'Asr"*[57] (or "the proposal to uplift the Arabic language, and steer it to meet the exigencies of the times"). In fact, the very premise of Fehmi Pasha's title assumed that the Arabic language was boorish, reactionary, and stagnant, and that it somehow needed to be "civilized."

As mentioned briefly in chapter 5, Fehmi Pasha's project consisted of seventy-three sections and three appendices that spanned some fifty pages.[58] Fehmi Pasha's paper took over two hours, truffled with raucous interruptions, to present.[59] In the paper's first three sections, Fehmi Pasha discussed the lives and deaths of languages, comparing them to living organisms that go through "the process of birth, life, old-age, and death, often leaving behind them successors who, in turn, go through the same cycle of life, development, decline, and death."[60] Fehmi Pasha noted that this was exactly the cycle that condemned the language of the ancient Egyptians, whose "Pharaonic idiom survived to our days, only in the bowels of papyrus, and in modern Egyptian expressions that cannot be traced to an Arabic etymology."[61] In a remark eerily reminiscent of Saïd Akl's fundamental (Lebanonist) arguments (regarding the "death" of the Arabic language), Fehmi Pasha noted that Greek and Latin followed the same course as Pharaonic Egyptian, with Latin giving birth to Italian and Spanish in modern times.[62] Still, Fehmi Pasha referred to the "death of the Arabic language" only tangentially, and only through references to languages that may have had parallels to the Arabic language.

Only in the sixth section of his study did Fehmi Pasha, again in a style and attitude remarkably redolent with Aklian audacity, discuss the peculiar case of the Arabic language and express wonderment at the "Arabs' inertia" when it came to the necessity of "render[ing] their speech forms into official languages [. . .] to be written and read, as well as spoken [. . .] in the same manner in which the French and the Italians [wrote] their own spoken Latin dialects."[63] This indolence of the Arabs, and this "burden of having to speak one language and write and read another," were in Fehmi Pasha's view, the very "plague" that afflicted the Arabs, causing the atrophy of their intellectual life, and rendering them "the earth's most miserable creatures."[64] Fehmi Pasha concluded his sixth section with a tirade on the inherent difficulty of the Arabic language; a vice which made the diglossic situation of the modern Arabs untenable, and all the more in need of urgent reform.[65] He finally postulated that the main cause of this "pathological complexity" of the Arabic language (from the difficulty of its grammar to its complicated diglossic oddity) was its "defective" writing system, "the very tragedy of the Arabic language."[66] Like Saïd Akl many years before him (and many more after him), Fehmi Pasha argued

that the task of reading in Arabic, because of the Arabic alphabet's lack of vowels and the profusion of diacritics and other cumbersome grammatical and pronunciation symbols, was a function of memory, not logic.[67]

During my May 2000 meeting with Saïd Akl, and in defense of his own Latin script, he illustrated the point about the Arabic alphabet's lack of vowels thusly: "In Arabic, as well as in English, reading and comprehension are a capacity provided by memory, not scientific knowledge or reason."[68] That's why Akl argued that in his alphabet, the symbol "*C*" always renders the sound "*SH*" and not any other sound, regardless of letter combinations. He explained that he devised the letter "*C*" to fill only one sound function, and not to produce an "*S*" at one time, a "*K*" at another, an "*SH*" at yet another time, or a "mute sound" altogether at yet another time (as often happens with the French "silent '*C*'").[69] Therefore, Akl claimed that we read the word "cough" in English the way that we do, not because its letters instruct us to do so, "not because of the logic of the spelling," but because our memory, "our prior exposure to the word 'cough,'" prompts us to do so.[70] This is not the purpose of an alphabet according to Akl; "reading should not rely on guesswork or divination."[71]

Later on, we shall see how in the Aklian alphabet, reading becomes a function of knowledge, which allows us to read correctly, in any language, regardless of whether or not we've had prior exposure to what is being read. With Saïd Akl, writing and reading become an impulse of logic, not a result of idle rote memorization. In this same vein, Fehmi Pasha would spend sections twenty-eight to seventy-three of his paper discussing the benefits of adopting a Latin script both for the Literary Arabic language and the Arab World's spoken vernaculars.[72] He argued that only in the adoption of the Latin alphabet, "in emulation of Turkey" would the Arabs' salvation be feasible—because, in his view, the Arabs' current obsolete writing system made reading strenuous and complicated, and consequently rendered learning an unattractive drudgery, which contributed to the Arabs' continued stagnation behind the rest of the world. But the Arabic language, both as a script and verbal tool, was not only a hallowed language of liturgy for Arabs and Muslims. It constituted the most important, and indeed perhaps the only acceptable, art form in the Arab and Muslim worlds. Indeed, relevant "Arabic" or "Islamic" artistic expression is only one that is linguistically based: literature and calligraphy. Therefore, what Fehmi Pasha was proposing was not only blasphemous from a religious perspective. It was also an incitement to make a break with the Arabs' "secular" literary, cultural, artistic, and overall creative heritage. This could in a way explain the vehement opposition that Fehmi Pasha's proposal encountered at the Linguistic congress. It could also account for the motives behind Louis Khalil's own animosity (affected as it may have been) toward Fehmi Pasha's design. Indeed, as a Christian,

a clergyman, and member of a minority community that literally resurrected the Arabic language (and perhaps even "invented" the modern concept of "Arabness" and Arab nationalism) Khalil may have had more at stake in the preservation of the Arabic language and its script than did the bona fide Arabs themselves. Not making waves, assimilating in the majority, being the promoters of the culture of the majority, dismissing one's own distinctness for the sake of conforming to the orthodoxies of the majority, indeed being unobtrusive and invisible, are some of the coveted qualities of Middle Eastern non-Muslim minorities. This could explain Louis Khalil's article, and his eagerness to demonstrate a more enthusiastic commitment to "Arabness" than the Arabs themselves.[73] Thus, father Louis Khalil was compelled to literally ridicule Fehmi Pasha's calls for the revamping of the Arabic alphabet in his *al-Mashreq* article. He scoffed at his argument that the Arabic language, with its diacritics and dotting systems was cumbersome, distractive, and confusing to the reader.[74] For instance, at one point in his paper, Fehmi Pasha claimed that in the current Arabic writing structure, dots and diacritics were traditionally omitted or misplaced, causing in the process, not only quandary for the reader, but possibly also printing errors, which could in turn lead to the transmission of the wrong ideas to the reader.[75] But Khalil argued that an Arabic writer, editor, publishing house, with a minimum of attentiveness and self-respect, would not put out books, or any other publications, with misplaced or omitted diacritics or dottings.[76] Therefore, instead of replacing the Arabic script with an inauthentic Latin one (to compensate for the lack of vowels, and simplify reading) Khalil proposed publishing to be done with complete diacritics and pronunciation symbols. In his view, this would resolve the problem of deciphering Arabic writing, prevent the pitfalls of grammar and pronunciation, and consequently simplify the entire process of acquiring and using the Arabic language. However, in Fehmi Pasha's view, this missed the whole point that he was trying to make. His aim was precisely to simplify Arabic writing, not complicate it and clutter it with additional imbrications of characters and symbols. He wanted writing and printing to be done in only one layer (not as is currently the case with Arabic: a basic cursive skeleton, then a second layer of dots, vertical bars and cross-bars, then yet another layer of vowels/diacritics and other pronunciation markers).

In the end, Louis Khalil's argument, although seemingly opposed to Fehmi Pasha's, seemed to confirm the latter's charge against the Arabic script's complexity, and its ultimate contribution to MSA's decline and desuetude.[77] In later years, Saïd Akl would claim that the decision to adopt the Latin script was not brash or contrived. To him, it was the outcome of years—indeed centuries—of trials, hesitations, and pitfalls. In the end, his own decision to adopt the Latin alphabet was reached based on

the script's long and rich history as an efficient, intelligible, and logical tool for learning and transmitting knowledge.[78]

Fehmi Pasha's was certainly an audacious proposal, especially since, unlike Saïd Akl's early 1930s experimentation, it had set itself a more ambitious objective than did Akl's strictly local (Lebanese) foray, and it sustained a vicious opposition at the ALS conference. Unlike Akl's, however, Fehmi Pasha's alphabet, although a great improvement on the Arabic script, was still rudimentary and defective in many of its characteristics. For instance, since the Latin script lacked representations of certain Arabic sounds, Fehmi Pasha opted to preserve the same Arabic letters for those sounds, and retained diacritic symbols and accents for others, to complement the new Latin alphabet.[79] For instance, the soft Arabic *Jiim*, the spirant laryngeal *Haa*, the spirant *Khaa*, the emphatic dental *Daad* and *Zhah*, the laryngeal *'Ayn*, the emphatic *Saad* and the velar *Ghayn*, all retained their original Arabic shapes. Similarly, the *Aleph*, the interdental *Thaa'* and *Zhaal*, as well as the *Sheen*, were all represented respectively by their corresponding Latin *A*, *T*, *D*, and *S,* however, they were all written with a "mutation symbol" over them.

This was the manner in which Fehmi Pasha compensated for the absence of Latin letters to represent Arabic sounds with no equivalents in European languages. In Akl's view, this mixing and matching was still an eyesore and a reminder of the incoherent, cluttered, and asymmetrical Arabic script, which Fehmi was trying to replace. Akl believed that the very adoption—or in the case of the Lebanese vernacular, the reappropriation and redemption—of the Latin alphabet was to keep with the spirit of "simplicity" of the first vocalic alphabet, whose purpose was to refine and attune the abstruse and discordant hieroglyphs and cuneiforms of its time. An alphabet in Akl's estimation had to be consistent, proportionate, harmonious, logical, and simple. That is why his, as he claims, came as a cohesive group of thirty-six shapely and coherent symbols that "soothed rather than shocked the reader" with their simplicity, logic, and symmetry. The Aklian alphabet had no cumbersome dots, no confusing accents or hyphens, no morphological mutations of letters, no umlauts, and no disturbing cedillas or diacritic symbols. With Akl, the alphabet, whether used for the Arabic language, the Lebanese vernacular, or any other language, consisted of only one lucid layer of writing.

MODERN CADMUS, JESUS, AND PHOENICIAN UNIVERSALITY

In *Byblia Grammata* Maurice Dunand argued that the Phoenician alphabet of Byblos was the singular, most complete human accomplishment

that had not been improved upon or transcended in its more than four-thousand-year existence.[80] Certainly, Dunand claimed, the Byblian alphabet has been adapted, amended, and rearranged to fit the needs of the disparate sounds of Man's different languages. Nevertheless, the concept itself—that of a system of symbols representing human sounds, or single phonemes (and ultimately abstract concepts) rather than pictograms representing concrete concepts; that concept itself—had not yet been matched by any subsequent human accomplishment.[81]

A close examination of alphabetic/scriptal Lebanonism will reveal the significant kinship of its alphabet to that of the first alphabet of Byblos. Indeed, given its simplicity, universality, and logic, it is quite feasible that the Aklian alphabet was proposed simply to facilitate the burdensome writing process of Middle Eastern languages and dialects. Nevertheless, one can hardly ignore the powerful underlying ideological motivations and the potential political ramifications that such an ambitious enterprise carries. Indeed, the effects of the Aklian alphabetic reform were not only limited to Akl's stated design: the seemingly anodyne assignment of a writing system to a verbal competency that previously lacked one. Indeed, as we saw earlier, the Lebanese vernacular was widely written prior to Saïd Akl, and continues to be written to this day, in the Arabic script, in spite of Akl's introduction of a new alphabet. In fact, the unstated Aklian mission was to give the Lebanese vernacular a new face that would have, over time, made its association with the Arabic language very difficult. It is precisely for similar reasons that the Turkish script was "Latinized" under Mustapha Kemal in Turkey, an attempt at dissociating from Islamic tradition and Arabic "cultural" kinship. And it is for similar reasons (with an inversion, of course) that Muslim speakers of Hindi, in what in 1947 became Pakistan, replaced the Nagari Sanskrit by the Arabic script and called the new product "Urdu."

If one is to believe Saïd Akl's claims, the main purpose of his proposed alphabetic reform was a three-pronged, neutral, and a purely technical project, bereft of the exclusivist ideological undertones of which language "reformers" are often accused.[82] In short, the Aklian alphabetic "corrective project" had the mission of: a) reforming all of the world's languages and scripts; b) reforming the Arabic language and its script; and c) providing the Lebanese language with its own authentic alphabet. In other words, with the introduction of a new script, Saïd Akl was embarking on a purely altruistic linguistic project, not a political program or an ideological scheme. It was no secret that he was aiming at filling a lacuna by endowing the Lebanese vernacular with its own writing tool. But his alphabet, he claimed, had a more humanistic, "Phoenician" universalist mission, the inauguration of a "simple, elegant, and logical" vocalic alphabet capable of adapting to the needs of all of the world's languages,

without snarling readers and writers in complicated diacritics or cryptic consonantal and vocalic symbols.[83] Therefore, in the manner of his Phoenician ancestor and lyrical hero Cadmus, Akl's aim was the institution of a simple alphabet that can improve, expand, and increase mankind's creativity, by reducing the amount of time writers and readers would otherwise spend deciphering diacritics, dots, hyphens, and accents. And so, claimed Akl, being burdensome and defective, the consonantal Arabic script needed urgent replacement. Just as he viewed himself as Lebanon's "Dante," who would restore the "Lebanese language" to its ancient glory and elevate an obscure and derided vernacular to the level of a prestige language, Akl also saw himself as a latter-day Cadmus who would teach the world a new alphabet.[84] His reform was one with "universal" dimensions, before being one limited to the service of a local, mainly Lebanese, objective.

Cadmus was not only Saïd Akl's lyrical hero, nor was he a mere mortal protagonist in an Aklian play. Cadmus, who according to Greek and Aklian mythology taught the ancient Greeks (and by association, mankind) how to read and write, was Akl's alter ego and heroic archetype. Therefore, endowing the world with a new "Cadmusian" alphabet became an Aklian obsession! And in the process of bequeathing a new, simple, and logical writing system, Akl's magnanimity was expected to trickle down to the Arabs, offering them a new vocalic script, and giving the Lebanese vernacular a written form. Thus, like its Phoenician inspiration of four thousand years earlier, the Aklian scriptal reform was suddenly commuted, from the perceived immediate, narrow, Lebanese national imperative, into an altruistic "universal," "human" necessity.

But why the choice of a Latin alphabet for the task? A simple answer to this question, although from the looks of things, could very well be anodyne and bereft of the slightest ideological undertones. But it could very well be also portent of a similarly pixyish question posed to Charles Corm some three-quarters of a century earlier, pressing him for a definition of being Lebanese. The crafty question, thrown by a Muslim politician, and its smug answer which Corm provided in a poem addressed to "my Muslim [Lebanese] brother," literally wrote the obituary of Phoenicianism as an integrative national philosophy potentially attractive to Lebanese Muslims.[85] Similarly, a simple answer by Akl in defense of his own choice of an adapted Latin script for the "Lebanese language" could also turn away potential Muslim supporters of his reform.

In a response practically defining the "true Lebanese" identity as exclusively Christian Lebanese, Corm wrote:

> My Muslim brother, do understand my candor,/ I am true Lebanon, sincere and observant,/ And all the more Lebanese that my faith typifies/ A pelican's

> heart./ If my Lebanese fervor is bound up in the Church's dogmas,/ That is so because,/ To my eyes they're universality,/ For, I cannot believe/ In a God that divides/ This vast humanity.[86]

In short, Corm's rejoinder was making the argument that, in spite of Lebanon's diverse character, and in spite of its multireligious human make-up, and in spite of its Phoenicianist secular ostentations, Lebanon remained essentially "Christian" in spirit. And Christian it was, not because of its Christians' numerical superiority, but because of Christianity's own superiority, humanism, goodness, and distinction vis-à-vis other traditions and belief systems. Christianity was the quintessence of humanism in Corm's view, making it a modern incarnation of Phoenician "pagan" humanism. And what more sublime incarnation of humanism than self-sacrifice for the salvation of others? And what better illustration of that typically Christian act of selfless altruism and charity than a "pelican's heart," than ripping one's own chest open and offering its contents to one's children and beloved—while the contents are still pulsating with life?[87] Christ did it for his children, and before him the Phoenicians (illustrated by Corm's "Pelican") did it for the whole of mankind. In summary, in order for them to become truly Lebanese, Corm was urging his Muslim countrymen to relinquish their uncouth, exclusivist, reductive Arab interpretation of Lebanon ("I cannot believe in a God that divides the vast humanity") and espouse the humane and liberal Phoenicianist conception, through its modern Christian Lebanese vector and revelation.[88] In 1970, Saïd Akl reworked Charles Corm's claims to argue not that Lebanese Christianity marked merely the diachronic evolution of Phoenician humanism and Phoenico-Lebanese continuity, but that humanism was indeed the very creation of Lebanon and Lebanon's bequest to mankind.[89] In his introduction to Kamal Charaby's Lebanese translation of John's Gospel, Saïd Akl postulated that not only was Christianity a "Lebanese Value" and a Lebanese generation, but so was Christ himself a Lebanese conception, and by association, so was the compassionate God of monotheism a Lebanese bequest to mankind.[90]

This story of Lebanon's innovation of Christianity, its discovery and refinement of Monotheism, and ultimately its diffusion of Lebanese humanism to the whole of mankind (as interpreted by Akl), revolved around the simple postulate that the town of Cana of Galilee was located in modern day Lebanon, not in modern day Israel. In addition to that, this whole spiritual edifice was built upon a colorful Aklian interpretation of John the Evangelist's account of the Gospel's "Wedding at Cana." It should be noted that John was the only Evangelist to relate the story of Cana, so there is really no way to contrast his narrative with the versions of others from among the followers of Jesus who were present at the wedding. But

that was never a concern for Akl. Indeed, he argued that for historical accuracy, only the Gospel of John should be looked at as an authentic account of the life and acts of Jesus.[91] Only John knew Jesus intimately enough, and was close enough to him, to be able to tell his story scrupulously and faithfully enough.[92]

In short, John's story of Cana tells us that Jesus and his disciples were attending a marriage in the village of Cana, in Galilee. During the party, the host came to run out of wine and disclosed his embarrassment to Mary, the mother of Jesus. Mary, who was apparently related to the parents of the bride and groom, sought the assistance of her son. Jesus, who was at the time busy with his own drinking party, petulantly rebuffed his mother a few times before finally deferring to her requests and giving assistance by changing water into wine. John concluded his account of the Wedding at Cana by declaring the water-into-wine incident Jesus' "first miracle." A milestone event after which the disciples of Jesus reportedly "believed in him," and Christianity began taking root and propagating.

In his penetrating (and definitively Lebanonist) interpretation of this seemingly banal story, Saïd Akl argued that Jesus was a mere mortal before this wedding at Cana-Lebanon. Lebanon transformed him into God, and subsequently repackaged him and exported him to the world as the God of Mercy and the Savior of Mankind. Here, we are no longer in the Cormian interpretation of Christianity as a doctrine that is morally and spiritually superior to others. Unlike Corm, Saïd Akl does not invite his "Muslim brothers" to espouse Christianity because Islam is inherently defective, or simply because the values of Christianity are more humanistic and more universal than those of Islam. He does so because in his view Christianity, like the Lebanese identity, and like the Lebanese language itself, is a Lebanese spontaneous generation, a sui generis which happens to be humanistic and superior to other doctrines (precisely because of its Lebanese origins). Thus, in Akl's interpretation, Jesus did not perform his first miracle at the time and place he did because "thus was it written" and "thus shall it be." No! Jesus became Jesus, the Son and incarnation of God, because Lebanon inspired Him—perhaps even commanded Him—to become so. Had He remained in Israel, or had He attended a wedding in Mecca instead of Cana (Lebanon), Jesus would never have become the celebrity that He subsequently became; His "Glory" would not have been revealed, and His followers would not have recognized Him as the "Son of God" that He was. As evinced by Akl, indeed Lebanon and Lebanese humanism were the essence of Jesus; "He came to us as a meek, ridiculed, Palestinian rabbi, we shipped Him to the world as a splendid Divinity."[93] Not only that, but in Akl's interpretation, the event at Cana, which took place in a misogynistic society, dignified women and mankind by bending the Creator to the will of His

creature.[94] Thus, in the Aklian interpretation, Jesus not only revealed Himself as God *in* Lebanon, but did so at the prodding of His mother—a mere human, a surrogate, a creation of His, and a woman to boot—at a time of *her*, not of his choosing.

Let us remember that, according to John (and Christian tradition) Jesus was almost disdainful of Mary, grumpy and borderline vicious when He dismissed her entreaties for help. He had been reportedly drinking and kept on pushing her away backhandedly when she persisted in her calls for His assistance. And then, when He would not answer her pleas and she would not give up and go away, He became visibly irritated with her pestilence and discourteously bellowed out His famed "what is that to me and to you woman, my hour has not yet come." He didn't do so as if Mary was His mother. He did not address Mary as "mother." Indeed His annoyance with her pushed Him to the brink of disowning her and denying His kinship to her. He curtly pushed her aside and literally told her to "stay out of His business," that He was not ready to perform His miracle yet, that He had already set His "alarm clock" for that auspicious hour, and that *that* hour had not yet come according to His schedule.[95] On the other hand, Mary did not rebuke her insolent son. She did not humiliate Him in front of his friends (as He had done her). In Akl's words, "she simply turned away, like the dignified human being (and mother of God) that she was, looked toward the wine-stewards, and commanded them to do as He—Jesus—was about to tell them." In Akl's estimation, she knew what was about to happen, and she knew that despite His petulance and impertinence, Jesus was about to obey her. After all, she was the mother of Jesus, regardless of whom Jesus thought He was. She was the one who gave Him birth, and consequently she knew Him better than He knew himself. Therefore, whether or not He thought that his hour had dawned to reveal His divinity, she made Him move that hour to a time of her choosing.[96] By telling the servants "do as He [Jesus] tells you," Mary knew that He was about to fulfill her wishes; she knew that she had just bent the Creator to her will. In Akl's view, that is precisely why Christianity means Universality, Humanism, and Humanity, because it rendered Man truly in the image of God, to the point of rivaling God in creativity, and to the point of forcing God's hand and compelling him to answer to the wishes of Man.[97] Furthermore, and what was perhaps more significant in Akl's view, was that the Man who ultimately forced God's hand was in fact a woman.[98] "*Trrrrrèèèès Joli [. . .] Trrrrrèèèès profond*,"[99] intoned Akl in a cascade of rolling Rs strewn in proud self-adulation, as much as in awe before the awesome beauty of the Christianity that he had just unveiled. Not only was Christianity "beautiful" and "profound" because of its humanism, but because Lebanon itself injected it with humanism and dignity for mankind (and womankind). And perhaps more significantly,

because Akl himself made that superb discovery, and recounted it with skill, verve, and lyrical charm, that only he could unfurl.

And so, to go back to the question posed above, why did Saïd Akl choose a Latin alphabet to codify the "Lebanese" language? The obvious answer is that Akl's choice was reached for the same reasons he had praised Christianity and glorified his Phoenician ancestors, Lebanese Universality! In his view, the modern Lebanese were the natural heirs and progenitors of the Latin alphabet. The Latin alphabet was the outcome of their Phoenician ancestors' national and intellectual genius. And therefore, it was only natural for the modern Lebanese to reclaim their ancestors' bequest and use it for their own language. But that was secondary, in Akl's view, to the fact that the Latin alphabet—certainly due to its Phoenician origins—was also the most complete, logical, elegant, and universal writing tool.[100] "If only you knew how majestic is the Lebanon I know" he kept intoning during our encounters in the summer of 2000.[101] Perhaps Akl best encapsulated his choice of the Latin alphabet in the last stanza of his *Sagesse de Phénicie*:

> We wrote very little? So What? Jesus wrote nothing at all./ Perfidious destiny!/ But sometimes, the pen, between our godlike fingers,/ Wrote heavens and earth, like Euclid's "Elements,"/ And sometimes, Oh! nothing more than 22 letters,/ high shrines of wisdom/ Where Man's homeless Intellect/ Came to dwell for evermore.[102]

Saïd Akl's stirring enthusiasm for the grandiose, for Lebanon, and for all things Lebanese, could not have allowed him to remain confined in the comforts of mediocrity. In his view, the Arabic script was mediocre, if not outright defective. Defective, because in the aggregate (and by Akl's own accounting) the Arabic alphabet consisted of a hodgepodge of over six-hundred discordant, confusing, and inconsistent shapes, letters, diacritic mutation points, and other scriptal declensions and alterations.[103] Therefore he, the "architect of the spirit of the nation," the "theologian of Lebanonism," "the father of Lebanon [*Abu-Lebnéén*]" could not have allowed his language to remain stagnant, and possibly to regress in the shackling scriptal clutter of Arabness, Arabism, and the Arabic language. A salutary surgical operation had to be performed; and bleeding had to be sustained, and perhaps even amputation had to be carried out in order to achieve success.[104] And if bleeding and amputation were to entail the abandonment of an obsolete script for the sake of a cutting-edge, dynamic, and practical one, "then so be it" argued Akl.[105]

According to the Aklian vision, two-thirds of Mankind's cultural patrimony was bequeathed by Lebanon. it included: a) The monotheism of a God of Mercy, and a belief in the hereafter; b) An elegant, logical, and simple alphabet, which became the repository of all of mankind's subsequent

creativity; c) The discovery of the "tom" ("a slit particle mistakenly called 'atom'") the foundation of all of mankind's subsequent scientific discoveries; d) Democracy; e) Stoicism; and f) Euclidean geometry, the stimulant of all of mankind's subsequent architectural inventiveness and refinement.[106]

Those were the sublime bequests of Lebanon, which in Akl's view drove Victor Bérard to baptize Lebanon "la mère-patrie de cet outre-mer appelée l'Europe" (the motherland of Lebanon's European overseas).[107] If that were indeed the case, how then could Akl have justified allowing his "language" to remain dormant (and to play second fiddle to a foreign language such as Arabic?) And how could he have allowed it to continue being written in an obsolete, unauthentic, shabby consonantal alphabet? More importantly, how could he have adopted for his language a Latin alphabet, a no less "alien" import than Arabic? After all, as the Lebanese journalist Jeanne D'Arc Buzeid put it in her *Golden Chronicle* television newsmagazine, "every time we utter the name of Lebanon, it's as if we were referring to Saïd Akl; and every time the name of Saïd Akl is mentioned, it's as if one is hinting to Lebanon."[108] That was the heavy mantle that Akl had to carry, as the "father of Lebanon." Therefore, he could not have remained silent in the face of the onslaught on his language, and in the face of the distortion and misrepresentation of his scriptal reform. But was a Latin script really the appropriate answer? "Yes!" answers resoundingly Saïd Akl, "because of its universality; because of its kinship to the Phoenician alphabet of Byblos; and because of the intense adaptation, refinement and perfection it underwent in the intellectual laboratories of Ancient Greece and Rome."[109]

Saïd Akl argued that his alphabetic reform was never intended to limit itself to narrow national dimensions. As mentioned earlier, the man was much more romantic and a more audacious dreamer than to get bogged down by timid half-measures. He was much more ambitious, and much more proud, and a much more impavid Phoenician than to remain in the limited bucolic horizons of "smaller Lebanon."[110] He intended his reform to be a new beacon to mankind and a new alphabet to benefit all of the world's languages, not only Lebanon's. Akl believed that his script will eventually be adopted by the entire world's living languages, because its simplicity and flexibility allowed it to adapt to all of mankind's phonemes, and made it all the more attractive and functional writing tool. He claimed that a German linguist named Hans Grosfeld had submitted to the UNESCO's linguistic conference (convened in Paris in 1973) a proposal for the adoption of the Aklian script as a "universal phonetic alphabet" to replace the standard currently in use.[111] It should be noted that the standard of International Phonetic Symbols for the English language contains some fifty-nine symbols (and the standard for French contains fifty-eight symbols). These are the various shapes (or the alphabet) that encompass all vocal combinations (or phonemes) possible in each of the English and

French languages. Again, these particular shapes (which one can find in the introduction of any French or English dictionary) have been devised solely for French and English, and cannot express other phonemes produced by other human languages and sounds (such as Arabic, Chinese, or Finnish for instance). Saïd Akl's alphabet on the other hand, the one whose adoption Grosfeld was reportedly promoting at the UNESCO in 1973, consisted of a mere thirty-six symbols, bereft of dots, hyphens, apostrophes, accents, or any cluttering, intrusive, or distracting diacritics or declension marks. What's more, these thirty-six symbols produce all of the sounds emitted by human speech. This, in Akl's view, incarnates the elegance of his script, and the spirit of its Phoenician progenitor.[112] This was also the criterion—elegance, logic, and simplicity—that allowed Grosfeld to advocate for the Aklian alphabet.

With mathematical precision, Akl intended his alphabet to convey the specificity and stability of numbers. Therefore, just as the symbol 7 would always denote the number seven, regardless of its position in any given mathematical equation, so would the letter U in the Aklian system represent only the sound for which it was devised. Consequently, the English letter U, chez Akl, would no longer denote the sounds produced in words such as You, Unusual, Flutter, and Flute all at once. His alphabet, he claimed, is so precise that even the timber of certain vowels is represented by its own symbol.[113] Similarly, the word *Lead* will no longer be read to denote both the heavy metal and the verb "to guide" at once.[114] The Elegance of the Aklian alphabet emanates then from its sobriety and clarity. A page written in the Lebanese script is never cluttered with accents, apostrophes, or a mix of Latin-looking symbols and Arabic ones (as was the case with Fehmi Pasha's proposed alphabet). There is definitely an enchanting elegance and a comforting harmony in the way a "Lebanese" sentence is drawn in the Aklian script. There is always only one layer of writing, one uniform gamut of harmonious symbols, with no alien interceptions (of accents, foreign shapes, or foreign letter). This makes the Aklian alphabet the tool of choice for mature and evolved thought according to those who have used it. To the disciples of Saïd Akl, their master's bequest was the most advanced incarnation of an intellect no longer beholden to the arbitrariness and inconsistencies of spelling. At the same time, the Aklian alphabet ushered in a luminous resurrection of the world's first alphabet, the one once refined and propagated by Sidon's Crown-Prince Cadmus.

THE LEBANESE PRINTING PRESS

Saïd Akl explains that the Syriac script, in which the "Lebanese language" was written prior to the Arab conquest,[115] depicted the Lebanese

phonology and inflections exactly as they sounded in spoken form.[116] These inflections, in his estimation, were completely alien to conventional Arabic speech, and had ultimately entered the modern Lebanese language through the bias of Phoenician and Syriac phonology. According to Akl, the problems besetting the development and evolution of the Lebanese language today, began when the Arabic printing press was introduced to Mount Lebanon during the nineteenth century. Up to that period, all of the Maronite rites, ceremonial practices, and prayer books were printed in the Syriac script. Even the formation of the Maronite clergy and the curricula of Maronite parochial schools required a rigorous education in Syriac. Furthermore, priests' homilies and sermons, although delivered in "dialectal" Lebanese, were written down in the Syriac script. This was the only endogenous writing tool for the clergy and the educated elites who wanted to use a system besides the ones adopted from European languages and European Christian missionaries. Even the progenitors and instigators of the Arabic literary renaissance movement of the late nineteenth century (the Yazigis, the Boustanys, and the Chidiacs), revealed a high level of erudition in Syriac, and often used the Syriac language extensively, whether in their research, translation, or in their own original writings.[117] The catalyst that neutralized these Syriac impulses, according to Akl, was the introduction into Lebanon of the Mar-Yuhanna Arabic printing press in 1733, which slowly replaced the Ain-Warqa Syriac press. Thus, the Maronite rites, ceremonial practices, and prayer books, which were previously being printed exclusively in the Syriac script, began to be produced in Arabic in 1733. "This is how squalor began encroaching on Lebanon" according to Saïd Akl; "it is the Maronites and their shortsighted clergy and prelates who brought this calamity upon us."[118] This is how Akl justifies his indictment of the Maronite establishment. It is the Maronites that he blames for giving the Arabic language a footing and entrenching it in Lebanon. Indeed, prior to the 1733 Arabic printing press, there was one Syriac printing press in the Qodeesha Valley at the Qannubeen Monastery in Northern Lebanon. In 1610, this press produced the first Arabic-language copy of the Old Testament.[119] However, this Arabic Bible was printed in Karshuni, in the Syriac script, as was the tradition in Mount Lebanon at that time.[120] Therefore, argued Akl, prior to the Mar-Yuhanna Monastery press, Maronite hymns, even if chanted in the demotic Lebanese,[121] were still written in Syriac, and were chanted with Syriac inflections and with Syriac phonology, in the manner of "nésjédlokh ya béériino, ya miin n'imt 'layno" ("we bow to you O Savior).[122] But when the Arabic printing press was introduced, this "Phoenician-Lebanese" hybrid began being written in the Arabic script, and thus its pronunciation began to get distorted and "Arabized" according to Saïd Akl.[123] Consequently, what had initially been a par excellence demotic Lebanese language, written in Syriac characters,

began to be labeled Arabic because not only was it now written in Arabic (ca. mid-1750s) but so did the Arabic pronunciation begin seeping into the traditional Syriac and vernacular rites. Soon, Maronite seminarians were required to learn proper Arabic pronunciation, grammar and declensions (*sarf wa nahw*) in order to institute better speech and pronunciation norms among parishioners and parochial school students, thus normalizing MSA in Lebanon.[124] In Akl's view, this aberrant situation could only be rectified through the introduction of a new printing press, one that could produce and repopularize the authentic Lebanese phonology.

In 1966, Saïd Akl, and a number of his associates, traveled to England, where they had commissioned Monotype Inc. of London, to manufacture the second (and what would turn out to be the last) Lebanese/Aklian printing press. Subsequent presses, and namely the one used beginning in 1980 for the publication of the periodical *Lebnaan*, were all domestically produced; computerized, state-of-the-art, efficient machines.

Although the periodical *Lebnaan* began publication at the outset of the Lebanon War in 1975, until 1980 it was being printed almost entirely in the Arabic script. As mentioned earlier, the Monotype typesetting, although a great improvement on the earlier printing press concocted at Beirut's Librairie Antoine,[125] it was still time consuming and labor intensive, and necessitated long hours of typesetting before the press could be actually set in motion. Consequently, Monotype was reserved for the publication of books, which did not have to answer to journalistic deadlines. Nevertheless, there were sections of *Lebnaan* that did indeed get printed in the Aklian script, but they remained very brief, and were reserved almost exclusively to short poetry and various shorter rubrics (literary contests and games, etc., to encourage readers submissions in the Lebanese script). In 1980, the whole business of printing became computerized in Lebanon. The *Lebnaan* press followed suit, and the entire newspaper began publication in the Aklian script.

However, the first Aklian press, restricted and primitive by today's standards, was a handspun contraption that churned out a still inchoate and imperfect prototypical Lebanese script. Although produced by one of Lebanon's most prestigious printing houses, Librairie Antoine, the pre-Monotype Inc., press yielded only two works in vernacular, Saïd Akl's *Yaara* in 1961, and Joseph Ghsayn's *Newwaar* in 1962. But during that period, the Aklian script itself was still in the early stages of its development; it had not yet attained the elegance, the logic, the uniformity, and the harmony that typify it today. This was also an era when typesetting was still done by hand and required months of tedious work, that often produced books speckled with errors and spelling mistakes. Today's Aklian script is more coherent and more consistent, and its characters have kept the spirit of the adapted Latin script almost intact. Conversely, the

initial Aklian script, even in its ostensibly advanced incarnation in 1961 (a far cry from Akl's early attempts in the 1930s), still displayed many traces of the Arabic alphabet that Akl toiled so hard to expunge from his final and most complete product. And it was the English-made Monotype press—also arguably primitive in comparison to today's rapid computerized typesetting—that generated the largest surge in the number of books printed in the Lebanese script, beginning in 1967. Furthermore, the Monotype press used the final incarnation of the Aklian script, the one which all the Lebanese language publications began adopting in 1968, and in which they continue to be published today.

Prior to his London trip, Saïd Akl, along with Fouad Gabriel Naffaah and a number of their associates who were traveling with him, paid a farewell visit to the Maronite archbishop of Beirut, archbishop Zyaadé. Zyaadé, it seems, was quite enthusiastic about the future "Lebanese" printing press, and wanted to make his own contribution to help defray the costs of manufacture and shipping of the machine. Fouad Gabriel Naffaah had told bishop Zyaadé that he, Akl, Fouad Ephrem-Boustany, and Jawaad Boulos, had each contributed 3,000 Lebanese Liras to cover the costs of what would, in 1967, become Akl's World Vintage Books Press (Ajmal Ketub al-'Alam). Consequently, Archbishop Zyaadé insisted on making his own 3,000 donation to the group. But the Archbishop also lamented the fact that seventy of his diocese priests were now (in 1966) delivering their church sermons in MSA, turning away from the spoken vernacular which was customary prior to the *aggriornamento* of Vatican II. He noted that this tendency was regrettable and feared that it would be irreversible, and would ultimately overwhelm all churches and dioceses in Lebanon. Akl replied that he rarely doubted the Archbishop's insights, but that he had to disagree with him and question his misplaced concerns.[126] Saïd Akl relates that thirty years following their encounter, and on the eve of his retirement, Archbishop Zyaadé contacted Akl to remind him of their discussion thirty years earlier, and to inform him that "all the priests of the Beirut Maronite Archdiocese had now reverted to delivering their sermons in Lebanese."

Akl considered this vindication a victory for the Lebanese people and the "Lebanese language," not a triumph for his own personal ideas. To him, the adoption of vernacular Lebanese was part of the "human intuition of taking the language of life, and shedding the language of death."[127] He surmised that the success of any idea or tendency (in this case, the legitimization and readoption of the "Lebanese language" and the Lebanese script) must be judged in terms of its national evolution and its receptivity by the people most concerned with it, and whose lives it is most probably bound to affect.

Indeed, as of the summer of 2000 (roughly thirty years after the inauguration of the Monotype printing press and World Vintage Books Press), there was already an inventory of over forty books published in the Lebanese script in Lebanon.[128] Conversely, during the eighteenth century, when Abdallah El-Zaakher established the Middle East's first Arabic script printing press in Mount Lebanon, the press churned out a paltry four books in almost a century. Of course, fewer people in Mount Lebanon were literate back in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and even fewer were literate in Arabic. This accounts for the paucity of books produced by the Mar-Yuhanna printing press. By the same token, although Lebanon can boast an 80 percent literacy rate today, the majority of its educated population is literate largely in French, Arabic, Armenian, Syriac, and English, and very few Lebanese seem to have caught the habit of reading in the Aklian script. Furthermore, the Aklian script has remained the province of a minute number of private schools' curricula[129] and a select group of Akl fans and devotees. Additionally, there exist no attempt on the part of the Lebanese authorities to standardize and systemize the teaching of the Aklian script, and therefore, there remains little urgency on the part of publication houses to begin an en masse defection to it. That is not to say that there is little demand for Lebanese "dialectal" literature. Indeed dialectal literature competes decently with Arabic literature among Lebanese readers, but the bulk of its aficionados still read it in the Arabic script.[130]

THE IDEOLOGY BEHIND THE SCRIPT

Outfitting a shapeless spoken vernacular with its own specific writing system is tantamount to a semiological mutiny in a semiologically uniform Middle East, where a crushing majority of people have for centuries used a single writing system, which has become so intimately twined in Arabic culture and Islamic civilization. In fact, the official induction of the Aklian script in 1961 should not be regarded as an innocuous, neutral, or benevolent reform. The graphic system introduced by Akl contained nationalistic dimensions and constituted a linguistic rebellion against the Arabic language (even if Akl himself denies that to be the focus of his movement). Nevertheless, whether undertaken consciously or not, the introduction of a Latinized Lebanese script was in line with Akl's pursuance of a new or redeemed Lebanese identity. As mentioned earlier, this was also a corollary of the authentication, purification, de-Arabization and codification of what Akl termed the "Lebanese" language.[131] And as a path to this "authentication" campaign, no Lebanese script could have

been a more logical choice than that of a modified Latin. After all, "borrowing" a Latin alphabet was a recovery of a Lebanese creation.[132] With his use of the Latin script, Akl was simply redeeming, rehabilitating, and reappropriating what was initially a Lebanese bequest to the civilization of Latium. A Latin script for writing the modern Lebanese language was a perpetuation of a consanguinity between the current Lebanese language, the ancestral Phoenician, and the languages of Europe, which in Akl's view survive today because of their adoption of the early Phoenician alphabet. With this justification, Akl could then authoritatively support the argument that his script was not an attempt to amputate the Lebanese vernacular from its "supposed" Arabic kinship, but rather to authenticate and buttress the Lebanese language. What can be more authentic than writing an authentic "Lebanese" idiom, in its original millenarian script?

Political realities, however, were quite different from Akl's emotional impulses and historical remembrances and interpretations. The adapted Latin script that he introduced, not only physically separated the Lebanese vernacular from the Arabic language and Lebanon's Arab environment. But by codifying the demotic Lebanese in written form Akl (knowingly or unknowingly, with or without malice) literally erected and honed up a sharp and impregnable barrier between the two "languages," the two scripts, and ultimately the two cultures. Whether acknowledged or not, an alphabetic "revolution" such as Akl's, touched upon the issue of dissociation and separation of one verbal competency from another. Indeed, that was the only practical means available to him to give the Lebanese vernacular a form (and ultimately a content) distinct from that of MSA and the Arabs. The adoption of a Latin script for the codification of a previously amorphous dialect, if successfully institutionalized, could ultimately make it well nigh impossible for future generations of Lebanese—who will come to know their spoken language under only one written form—to recognize the incipient kinship between their spoken Lebanese language and the Arabic language. That was exactly the catalyst that separated the dialects of Latin—French, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese and the rest—from the mother language. That was exactly what Hindi, written in an Arabic script, did to the development and codification of Urdu. That was exactly how the Turkish "linguistic revolution," *Turk Dil Kurumu*, purified the Turkish language and detached it from its Muslim and Arabic accretions.

Saïd Akl is nearing his one-hundredth birthday. He is by no means naïve, as is he nowhere near mental or physical infirmity. To the contrary, he is a seasoned and well-respected intellectual, not only in Lebanon, but also throughout the Arabic-speaking world and throughout the Lebanese universe (which he often visits). Until the year 2001, he was still teaching a course in theology, and another one in Lebanese literature,

at Lebanon's Notre Dame de Louayzé University, above Jounié. He still lectures at many venues throughout Lebanon and Europe. And he still writes much coveted, and widely read commentary columns in various Lebanese publications—namely, and until 2001, in Lebanon's foremost Arabist newspaper, *al-Safir*.[133] Therefore, it would be disingenuous to believe that Saïd Akl was at anytime during his long intellectual journey unaware of, or indifferent to the potent ideological dimensions of the "alphabetic revolution" he was in the process of engineering. Indeed, he must have been entirely conscious of the fact that a graphic transcription of the spoken word was the surest road toward vernacular standardization, which would ultimately lead to language preservation and cultural autonomy for Lebanon. Pre-Aklian "nationalist" currents failed in accomplishing a sociocultural integration of all Lebanese and separation from the "Arab world." Akl, perhaps unjustifiably, believed that language could contribute to the attainment of this desired national integration. Reality points perhaps to different results. As it turns out, Akl's scriptal initiative was popular among the majority of Lebanese Christians who lacked their Muslim countrymen's emotional and spiritual attachment to the Arabic language and its script. Conversely, Akl's alphabetic enterprise remained moot among the majority of Lebanese Muslims, most of whom may have regarded it as an affront to Islam, its liturgical language, and its scriptal tool. In short, to the Muslims of Lebanon, the Aklian alphabet was nothing less than a Western import, and an insidious tool aimed at disrupting and modifying what was in their view a monolithic Muslim and Arab world, of which Lebanon was part and parcel. Meanwhile, Akl's reform was packaged both, as an attempt at reforming a corrupt script, and as an emblem of Lebanon's national specificity. At least, the early manifestations of his enterprise were not an acknowledged attempt at negating the Arabs, Arabism, or the Arabic language. But in a sense, the Muslim Lebanese alarmists were justified in their concerns. For as long as the Lebanese vernacular had been written in Arabic characters, its users—whether poets, artists, intellectuals, and teachers or laymen—would have remained somehow (even if only psychologically) linked to the Arabic language, and therefore less sensible to the cultural and linguistic variances in the Middle East. In other words, as long as the Lebanese vernacular was written in an Arabic script, at least on a popular level, it would have remained simply a dialectal variant of MSA, and therefore a competency different in degree not in kind from the common written MSA.[134] Even Pakistan's Urdu, which to many Indians remains essentially Hindi written in Arabic characters (and thus assigned a contrived difference from India's language), would still have been referred to as Hindi (even by Pakistanis), had it kept its Devanagary/Sanskrit writing system. French linguist, Louis-Jean Calvet, argued

that there exists a phenomenon of "linguistic assimilation" in the very adoption of any given script.[135] The two most notable examples of such a "linguistic assimilation" are those of Kemalian Turkey and the Muslim republics of the former Soviet Union. The suppression, and later the omission of the Arabic alphabet in Turkey (and in the former Soviet Muslim republics) and their replacement by an adapted Latin script during the first half of the twentieth century, had the stated purpose of offering a simpler modern writing standard.[136] What they did in reality, was disconnect both Turkey and the former Soviet Muslim republics from their Muslim past. In the case of the former Soviet Union, the Cyrillization of the Kyrgyz and Tadzik Russified these languages (even if only psychologically in the minds of both speakers and outsiders). Similarly, the Latinization of the Turkish language facilitated its draining of its Arabic lexical and grammatical contents, and accelerated its Europeanization and ultimately its separation from its Muslim (Arab) past. Similarly, Pakistan's amputation of "Muslim" Hindi from its Devanagari script literally created a new language, Urdu. In the same vein, the Aklian (and before him Fehmi Pasha's and Taha Husayn's) designs to adopt a Latin script, was a milestone away from the Arabic language, and in the direction of linguistic autonomy. This linguistic autonomy (or linguistic Lebanonism) would have then led to Lebanon's complete national and cultural independence from its Arab environment.

It should be noted also that the adoption of a Latin script for the Lebanese vernacular constituted another milestone toward communion with the languages of Europe, of which Lebanon was, according to Saïd Akl (and Charles Corm before him), an ancestor and a progenitor.

MUSLIM ADVOCATES OF THE NEW SCRIPT?

As mentioned above, initially Saïd Akl's introduction of a new "Lebanese" alphabet was a corollary to his linguistic reform project, and was ostensibly initiated and packaged as an effort to facilitate the writing of Arabic and to provide the Arabic language with a vocalic alphabet, in addition to it being the particular writing tool for the Lebanese vernacular. A closer examination of the Aklian script, however, has demonstrated that Saïd Akl's proposed semiological separation had the clear purpose of buttressing the linguistic separation he postulated between the Lebanese vernacular and the Arabic language. As it turned out, a modified Latin alphabet, used to codify the Lebanese vernacular in written form, had an added purpose of creating the illusion of a linguistic separateness between Arabic and the Lebanese vernacular, at least on a popular

level, and therefore accomplish a conclusive and immutable separation between the two competencies.

In spite of the obvious, Saïd Akl rejected the "superficial" arguments of those who sought to accuse him of wanting to amputate Lebanon from its Arabic lineage. As mentioned earlier, he viewed his reform as, above all, one with universal dimensions, and one with corrective measures intended for all of the world's languages. Consequently, he maintained that his calls to abandon the Arabic script stemmed from an intellectual necessity, not a purely political objective. In short, he argued, like many Arabic linguists before him, that the Arabic script was inadequate and corrupt for the Arabic language itself. Therefore, in his estimation, he should not have been expected to force a deficient script on a "complete and exquisite language," the "Lebanese language." In short, to use the Arabic script as a receptacle for intellectual creativity was to produce deficient and stunted cultures in Akl's view. Anis Freyha, a colleague of Akl's (and an Arabic philologist and linguist who has worked closely with Sati' Al-Husri) was an enthusiastic advocate of MSA. Nevertheless, Anis Freyha concurred with Saïd Akl's views. He agreed with Akl's characterization of the Arabic script as a barren and inadequate receptacle of creativity. Indeed, Freyha cited the Egyptian Qasem Ibrahim who argued that "an Arab must first understand, in order to be able to read [. . . an impulse that is] contrary to the fundamental function of reading."[137] Freyha concluded that the "Arabic 'word' is a worthless, useless skeleton" that remains incomprehensible to the average reader, unless he or she understands it from context before actually reading the integrality of the sentence or passage that contain it.[138] Like Fehmi Pasha before him, Anis Freyha argued that this defect of the Arabic script is the main culprit in the stagnation and regression of the Arabic language itself, and the decline of Arabic culture as a whole.[139] He argued that "even teachers of Arabic, are unable to read their language properly, precisely because of the obstacles that the script itself has erected between them and their language."[140] Even Uthman Sabri, in a 1964 work entitled *Toward a New Alphabet*, made the claim that it is going to be impossible to fight illiteracy with the Arabic script, and "all the efforts furnished by Egypt [in that domain] will come to naught."[141] And that was so, in his view, because Egypt was fighting illiteracy with "blunt swords that wouldn't slice, and loose bows that wouldn't reach their target; and by this, I am referring to our current [Arabic] alphabet."[142] Even with the use of diacritics and contrived vocalic symbols (a proposal we saw earlier with Louis Khalil), Sabri argued that the difficulty of reading Arabic will remain. Because, in an effort to simplify the Arabic alphabet (while maintaining the spirit of the Arabic script itself) copyists, writers, publishers, as well as readers could end up with an excess of six hundred symbols to

decipher.[143] It was for this reason that Abdelaziz Fehmi Pasha was driven into despair, and bluntly called the Arabic script the Arabs' "vicious scourge," their "great plague," and their "cancer, which disfigures their language, [. . .] suppresses their spirit, and prevents them from joining in the procession of modernity, culture, and learning."[144]

Like a good number of users of the Arabic script, Saïd Akl felt constrained by its complexity and its multifold writing layers. That is why he felt it necessary to abandon it. "Writing in the Arabic script [was] like wearing an iron-collar," he claimed.[145] Therefore, deserting it became an intellectual necessity to the same extent that it had been a national Lebanonist imperative. This "intellectual" functional cloak, in which scriptal Lebanonism was ensconced, made it easier for Lebanese Muslim intellectuals to join and contribute to Saïd Akl's movement. Still, their espousal of scriptal and linguistic Lebanonism was by no means epidemic, and had very little general appeal among Lebanese Muslim laymen. Nevertheless, such important figures as Kamal Charabi, Nagib Jamaleddin, Abdallah al-'Alayli, and 'Adel Isma'il, on account of their mere association with Saïd Akl, gave Lebanonism, if not political relevance, then at least the intellectual legitimacy to flaunt its heteroclite secular ostentations.

Nagib Jamaleddine, who was mentioned earlier in this study as one of the major contributors to Saïd Akl's World Vintage Books series during the 1960s and 1970s, was a Lebanese Shi'ite native of Baalbeck. He remained a loyal colleague of Saïd Akl's and an affiliate of the Université Saint-Esprit in Kaslik, ever since Akl's initiation of Lebanonism and the 1950 founding of the Kaslik University. Jamaleddine was also an active member of Saïd Akl's innermost Lebanonist circle, and he delivered numerous lectures at Kaslik, which became the group's major academic platform, as the activities of the Cénacle Libanais began waning in the early 1970s. In 1950, Nagib Jamaleddine became the first member the Beirut Bar Association to write and deliver his judicial procedures, in a Lebanese court of law, in the "Lebanese language." Indeed, Jamaleddine was so devoted to the Aklian vision that in a 1970 talk delivered at the Kaslik University, he would boldly advocate that the Arabic language be altogether eliminated from Lebanon's school curricula.[146] He even argued that the very dynamism of the Lebanese nation required it to "debunk the sophistry" that was the Arabic language, and to "cleanse people's minds by way of new resourceful Lebanese ways of thinking," away from the Arabic language and the cultural stagnation that it engendered.[147] Of course, this inherent Lebanese dynamism required also discarding political confessionalism, according to Jamaleddine. But most importantly, it required abandoning the Arabic language and the Arabic script, which were a symbiotic bedmate of Arabism, and possibly the cause and justification of political confessionalism in Lebanon.[148] This was a bold and

risky exploit, admitted Jamaleddine; but it was incumbent on Lebanon, and worthy of a Hannibal and a Saïd Akl.[149]

Kamal Charabi was another Muslim, and a Sunni from Damascus, who accompanied Saïd Akl on his Lebanonist campaign. Indeed, Charabi was the most active and motivated from among the group of translators who transferred celebrated works of world literature into dialectal Lebanese during the 1960s and 1970s. He was also the translator of the Gospels and the Koran into Lebanese, attempting to prove once more the nonconfessional attributes of Saïd Akl's movement. So was the Sunni linguist Abdallah al-'Alayli from among Saïd Akl's staunchest supporters. However, this multidenominational support remained confined to the intellectual domain, and very seldom did it spill over to the realm of the general public as far as Muslim Lebanon was concerned. In the words of Nagib Jamaleddine, the majority of Lebanon's Muslims preferred the safety of acquired traditions and conventions, and insisted on "denying Lebanon its true self" by rejecting the dynamism of Lebanonism and espousing stagnation.[150] For this, those reactionaries deserved Jamaleddine's lamentations and his exhortations to bury the old fossilized traditions—the Arabic language, its script, and Arab nationalism—in order to move into the future.[151] In Jamaleddine's view, "Lebanonism was secular, anticonfessional, liberal, pacifist, guileless, progressive, loath to empty pompous orations, and aware of itself and of its role as the only path to salvation," not only for the Lebanese, but also for all Middle Easterners convinced of their region's diversity, and cultural multiplicity and distinction.[152] Thus, in the grandiloquent style of poets, Nagib Jamaleddine, Kamal Charabi, and many other Muslim advocates of Saïd Akl's ideas still clung to the dream of turning the Lebanonist ideals into a realistic political program that could harmonize Lebanon's disparate cultural tendencies and conflicting histories, and reveal a non-Arab, diverse Middle East to its true self, a polyglot, multicultural, multiethnic universe.

NOTES

1. Internet source, "The Phoenician Encyclopedia," in *A Bequest Unearthed: Phoenicia*, www.phoenicia.org
2. Kees Versteegh, 79.
3. Farah, "So You'd Like to Learn Arabic: Got a Decade or So?" 4.
4. Akl, *Interview*. See also *Dilemmas and Strengths*.
5. Akl, *Interview*.
6. Akl, *Interview*.
7. Akl, *Interview*.
8. Akl, *Interview*.

9. Akl, *Interview*. During my first Sunday (May 14, 2000) meeting with Saïd Akl, he ate his breakfast while talking to me. The "traditional" Zahliote Sunday breakfast consisted of raw lamb-liver, with tomatoes, onions, and mint. Akl did not drink the traditional "Arak," nor did he eat any bread, although both are obligatory with the *'Asbé* (raw liver) breakfast. He did however eat plenty of tomatoes.

10. See the article "Lebnaani w Bass" [Lebanese, Period], in *Lebnaan*, Volume IX, Number 417, Friday, April 20, 1984, 3.

11. In television appearances, public lectures, or private encounters, Saïd Akl makes a point of differentiating between spoken and written languages. Consequently, the Lebanese vernacular is never referred to as a dialect of Arabic by Saïd Akl. See for instance "Hiwar al-'Umr" [Interviews of a Lifetime], aired on the Lebanese Broadcasting Company in the summer of 1996.

12. As a matter of fact, I was both relieved and puzzled by how forgiving and understanding he was, in spite of my first fumble. Indeed, he turned out to be a genuine teacher, always willing to explain, define, demonstrate, and clarify. He had initially granted me a two-hour interview; we ended up talking for six hours, until I ran out of tape. He actually asked me to come see him again if I needed anything else, and I ended up visiting with him many times (at times reading in his home library) and ended up attending his lectures at Université Notre Dame de Louayzé.

13. Akl, *Interview*.

14. Akl, *Interview*.

15. Akl, *Interview*. See also *Sagesses de Phenicie*, 67.

16. Akl, *Interview*. See also *Lebnaan*, Vol. XI, Number 516, Friday, April 11, 1986.

17. Akl, *Interview*.

18. Akl, *Interview*. See also *Cadmus*, 209–10.

19. Saïd Akl, *Interview*.

20. Akl, *Interview*.

21. Akl, *Interview*.

22. Akl, *Interview*.

23. Akl, *Interview*.

24. See Akl's *Ecce Libanus*, Article V. "The Lebanese language, which is a living endogenous Lebanese language, and which already benefits from its own alphabet, is Lebanon's national language. It is only seconded by the eight major world languages, in which 92 percent of the world's books are published yearly." See also *If Lebanon Could Speak* and *Dilemmas and Strengths*.

25. Akl, *Interview*. See also *Cadmus*, 210.

26. Akl, *Cadmus*, 164–65, 172, 210.

27. Barthélemy, *Dictionnaire*, V.

28. Barthélemy, *Dictionnaire*, V.

29. Charles Bruneau, *Petite Histoire de la langue Française* (Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, 1955), 32.

30. Note how Saïd Akl dismissed this conclusion in an earlier chapter by claiming that one cannot kill a corpse.

31. Lammens, "The Issue of Alphabet," 120–21.

32. Lammens, "The Issue of Alphabet," 120–21.

33. Lammens, "The Issue of Alphabet," 120–21.
34. Lammens, "The Issue of Alphabet," 120–21.
35. Lammens, "The Issue of Alphabet," 120–21.
36. Lammens, "The Issue of Alphabet," 120.
37. Lammens, "The Issue of Alphabet," 121.
38. Stanford and Ezel Kural Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey*, Vol. II (Cambridge, Mass.: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 263.
39. Shaw, *History of the Ottoman*, 263.
40. Shaw, *History of the Ottoman*, 262.
41. See Lammens in *al-Mashreq*, 121.
42. See Israel Gershoni and James Jankowski's *Egypt, Islam, and the Arabs: The Search for Egyptian Nationalism, 1900–1930* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 220.
43. Lebanese and Egyptian newspaper samples, published in Arabic during the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, and which I examined in Beirut and Paris, reflected (in my view) either a crude defective MSA writing style, or an attempt to write in a "formal" cultivated dialectal form. The Lebanese dialectologist Jabbour Abdennour mentioned that the weekly newspaper *ad-Dabbur* (The Hornet), first published in 1925, was printed in dialectal Lebanese (because it targeted an audience of peasants and laborers, who not only were unable to read Arabic, but were also unable to understand it when read to them). And so, according to Abdennour, *ad-Dabbur* would be read out-loud, in public, to reach the largest number of Lebanese. For more on this, see Jabbour Abdennour's *Etude sur la Poésie Dialectale au Liban* (Beirut: Second Edition, Publications de l'Université Libanaise, 1966), 34–35.
44. Louis Khalil, "How to Improve Arabic: The Latin Alphabet Project," in *Al-Mashreq*, 3–14.
45. Akl, *Interview*.
46. Akl, *Interview*.
47. Akl, *Interview*. Akl actually refers to the keepers of the establishment as "excrement."
48. Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age, 1798–1939* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 339.
49. Hourani, *Arabic Thought*, 276.
50. Kemal Karpat, *Political and Social Thought in the Contemporary Middle East* (Frederick A. Praeger Publishers, 1968), 84.
51. Husayn, *The Future of Culture*, 3–4.
52. Karpat, 84.
53. Khalil, "How to Improve Arabic," 3.
54. Khalil, "How to Improve Arabic," 3.
55. Khalil, "How to Improve Arabic," 3.
56. Khalil, "How to Improve Arabic," 3.
57. Khalil, "How to Improve Arabic," 3–4.
58. Khalil, "How to Improve Arabic," 3–4.
59. Khalil, "How to Improve Arabic," 3–4.
60. Khalil, "How to Improve Arabic," 3–4.
61. Khalil, "How to Improve Arabic," 3–4.

62. Khalil, "How to Improve Arabic," 3–4.
63. Khalil, "How to Improve Arabic," 3–4.
64. Khalil, "How to Improve Arabic," 3–4.
65. Khalil, "How to Improve Arabic," 4–5.
66. Khalil, "How to Improve Arabic," 5.
67. Khalil, "How to Improve Arabic," 5. See also Akl's "Theatre," 41–52.
68. Akl, *Interview*.
69. Akl, *Interview*.
70. Akl, *Interview*.
71. Akl, *Interview*.
72. Khalil, "How to Improve Arabic," 3.
73. Anis Freyha, who attended the congress with Khalil, wrote volumes, in Arabic, and in support of abandoning the Arabic language and the Arabic script. But he did so in the guise of scholarship, without making explicit reference to his demands, without resorting to demeaning language vis-à-vis the Arabic language and its script, and without explicitly calling for a new alphabet and the promotion of the vernacular languages. See Freyha's *Dialects and the Methodology for Studying Them*. Similarly, while indicting the Arabic language, Saïd Akl continued writing in it.
74. Khalil, "How to Improve Arabic," 6.
75. Khalil, "How to Improve Arabic," 6. It should be noted that typesetting was done by hand back then, and this problem was quite prevalent. Even in today's computer age, this is still an issue with the Arabic printing press. Louis Khalil seemed, however, intent on minimizing Fehmi Pasha's argument.
76. Khalil, "How to Improve Arabic," 6.
77. Indeed, Khalil's argument was that Arabic grammar would be simplified and made more accessible as soon as texts begin to be written and printed with full punctuation and diacritics. This, as Akl would show later, was the main reason why diacritics and other symbols were neglected; the fact that they are time-consuming, cumbersome, and distractive (which ultimately turn them into an end, not a means to an end).
78. Akl, *Interview*.
79. Khalil, "How to Improve Arabic," 5.
80. Maurice Dunand, *Byblia Grammata* (Beirut, 1945), 195. See also *Cahiers de l'Est*, Vol. 6 (Beirut 1946), 151.
81. Dunand, *Byblia Grammata*, 195.
82. Akl, *Interview*. See also *Ecce Libanus*, Art. XVIII, 3.
83. Akl, *Interview*.
84. Akl, *Interview*.
85. Corm, *La montagne inspirée*, 61.
86. Corm, *La montagne inspirée*, 61.
87. French Romantic literary tradition, with which Akl, Corm, and all their cohorts were imbued, teaches every Lebanese pupil that pelicans possess remarkably selfless parental instincts, which move them into tearing their chests open (with their own long pointed bills) to feed their hungry fledglings. This is the act of self-sacrifice that Corm alluded to when speaking of the "Pelican's heart." In reality, pelicans do not exactly commit suicide to feed their young. They are

simply blessed with a stretchable supply pouch that runs the length of their bills, and in which they store their catch of the day. To feed their young they simply stretch their jaws open, lowering the bottom one down along their necks, giving the impression to the observer from afar that their chests are torn open and that the fledglings are feeding on their parent's flesh.

88. Corm, *La montagne inspirée*, 61.

89. Kamal Charabi, *Mar Yuhanna al-Injil* [The Gospel According to John] (Beirut, Lebanon: Ajmal Ketub al-'Alam, 1970), 4. This is a Lebanese translation of the "Gospels According to John," with an Introduction by Sa'id Akl. Incidentally, the Lebanese translation of the "Gospels According to John" was the work of a Sunni Damascene named Kamal Charaby, who would accompany Akl throughout his Lebanonist mission. By 1970, Charaby had translated a total of five works into Lebanese, *The New Testament*, *Proverbs: La Fontaine* (2 Volumes), *The Moon Swing* (Translated from the Arabic language. The original was by Salah Labaki), and Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*.

90. Charabi, *Mar Yuhanna*, 4.

91. Charabi, *Mar Yuhanna*, 4.

92. Charabi, *Mar Yuhanna*, 4.

93. Akl, *Interview*.

94. Charabi, *Mar Yuhanna*, 10.

95. This was the kind of language in which Saïd Akl interpreted the story during our interview. These are the same semantics he used also in one of his theology lecture, which I attended at the Université Notre-Dame, Louayzé.

96. Akl, *Sagesse de Phénicie*. For more on Man's competition with God, see chapter 5. See also *Le Document de l'Intércreisme*.

97. Akl, *Sagesse*, 167.

98. Akl, *Sagesse*, 167.

99. Akl, *Interview*. "Beautiful. [. . .] Very deep."

100. See Maurice Dunand's *Byblia Grammata*.

101. Akl, *Interview*.

102. Akl, *Sagesse*, 167.

103. The "six hundred" figure was given to me by Akl during one of our meetings at Lwayzé during the summer of 2000. As an exercise, I set out that same evening to account for all of the "Arabic" shapes that I was familiar with (initially incredulous and suspicious of Akl's figures, and intent on proving him wrong, or else, overinflating a much more modest figure). But I should have known better with Akl. My inventory took into account the grammatical peculiarities of the *hamza*, and the changes in the auxiliary letters that carry it; and most of the traditional, and Qoranic diacritics and symbols (most of which remain arcane). I also accounted for the morphological instability of most letters of the Arabic alphabet (which change sharply in shape depending on whether they fall in independent, initial, medial, or final positions, and depending on whether they are connector letters, nonconnector letters, one-way connectors, or two-way connectors). The end result brought me closer to seven hundred variants or alterations (rather than the six hundred figure given to me by Akl).

104. Akl, *The Tomorrow of the Elite*, 184–85.

105. Akl, *Interview*. See also *The Tomorrow of the Elite*.

106. *Ecce Libanus*, Art. IV. See also *Sagesse*, 167.

107. *Ecce Libanus*, Art. IV. See also *Lebnaan*, Vol. XI, Number 512, Friday, March 14, 1986.

108. *Golden Chronicle*, a Channel 7 Lebanese Television newsmagazine, hosted by Jeanne D'Arc Buzeid, October 1979.

109. A quote Saïd Akl gave me from an Anis Freyha article in the periodical Al-Hékmé, Number 7, 4th year, Beirut, 1955, p. 11.

110. Akl, *Interview*. Akl makes a distinction between "Pride and Conceit." He argues that "conceit is vile and offensive; and it usually relates to the Self, and could lead to the hatred of the other." On the other hand, "pride is noble," especially when (as is the case with Akl) it pertains to one's country and history. "I am not conceited, I am proud of my country, my history, and my people."

111. Akl, *Interview*. See also an Interview with Akl conducted by the Lebanese Arabic language daily *Al-Anwaar* (Beirut, Sunday, May 4, 1980), 15.

112. Akl, *Interview*. Akl argues that "two-thirds of [his] intellect is the outcome of Greco-Roman tradition. Why censure me then for harking back to that wellspring, which in any case was initially a Phoenician bequest?" On the other hand, he claims that "my intellect has one cent's worth of Arabic-generated knowledge [. . .] and you expect me to toil to safeguard the Arabic language and the Arabic script? What have they brought me besides stagnation and decadence?"

113. For instance, the emphatic A sound in the Arabic word *Allah* has a different symbol from the soft A sound in the Arabic verb *Kaana.*

114. And here, we are still miles away from the French word for "bird," *oiseau*, where not one of its letters was ever intended to carry the sound for which it was ascribed, that is, *wazo*.

115. For more on this, see Kamal Salibi's *Maronite Historians of Mediaeval Lebanon*, on the works of Bishop Gebra'el Ibn al-Qilaa'i, Estephan al-Dwayhi, and Tannus al-Shidyaq.

116. Akl, *Interview*.

117. The archives of the St. Joseph School, Antoura, revealed school curricula, books, and course transcripts in Syriac, some dating back to the late 1800s.

118. Akl, *Interview*.

119. Hitti, *Lebanon in History* (Arabic translation) (Beirut, 1985), 555.

120. Hitti, *Lebanon in History*, 555.

121. The "demotic Lebanese" was in Akl's a crossbreed of an Arabic variant set on a Syriac lexical, phonological, and grammatical substructure.

122. Akl, *Interview*.

123. Akl, *Interview*.

124. Akl, *Interview.* Akl actually argues that this was the "contribution of Bishop Farhat" of Beirut, who made it his lifelong crusade to teach his priests *Sarf wa Nahw*, so as "to better distort and erase Lebanese phonology."

125. Librairie Antoine is one of the largest book wholesalers in Lebanon, and one of the oldest (modern) publishers. In addition to that, Librairie Antoine was, and remains to this day, the publisher of all of Saïd Akl's Lebanese (dialectal) work.

126. Akl, *Interview.*

127. Akl, *Interview.* See also *Dilemmas and Strengths*, op.cit.

128. Discounting *Yaara* of 1961, and *Newwaar* of 1962, both of which were printed by a makeshift press and in a still embryonic script, the World Vintage Books roster can claim the following originals and translations: *Phoenician Poets*, 1968; *Verses and Images*, 1968; *Defense of Socrates*, 1968; *Romeo and Juliet*, 1968; *The Moon Swing*, 1969; *The Gospel According to John*, 1970; *Nahj el-Balaagha*, 1971; *Proverbs: La Fontaine*, 1972; *Antar of Chekri Ghaanem*; *The Enchanted Castle*; *Omar Khayyaam's Rubaa'iyaat*; *Al-'Uwzaa'i's Edicts and Sermons*; *The Elements*; *The Epistles of Paul*.

129. Among them my own school, which introduced a mandatory one hour per week reading session in the Aklian script.

130. Abdennour, *La Poésie*, 9.

131. Part of this "Lebanonization" of the Lebanese dialect (which to many could be construed as "Romanization") was the Europeanization of certain terminologies (that is, "Analefbéiyyé" for illiteracy, "Interémmwiyyé" for internationalism, etc.).

132. Charles Corm alludes to this point in pages 101–2 of his *La montagne inspirée*. In fact he argues that the languages of Rome, Paris, and London (in sum, today's prestige languages) were of "our [Lebanese] making," but that they were "snatched from us [the Lebanese], [. . . and] were enriched by exile," which caused them ultimately to "disdain [and deny] their ancestry." Akl's "Latin" script was simply reclaiming the loss Corm was lamenting.

133. Saïd Akl earns the equivalent of $5,000 per week for two weekly columns he writes for *As-Safeer*. He argues that, although *As-Safeer* and he are on two opposing sides of the Lebanese political fence, his contributions are solicited by the newspaper, and he uses that pulpit to reach an audience that wouldn't normally be exposed to his ideas.

134. Even to readers of Arabic who do not understand Persian or Urdu, somehow, psychologically at least, a level of kinship is perceived between Arabic, Urdu, and Persian, in their estimation; even though those three languages might be genetically unrelated.

135. Calvet, *La Guerre des Langues*, 224.

136. Calvet, *La Guerre des Langues*, 224.

137. See Anis Freyha in *Al-Hékmé*, Volume 7 (Beirut, 1955), 11.

138. Freyha, *Al-Hékmé*, 11.

139. Freyha, *Al-Hékmé*, 9, 11.

140. Freyha, *Al-Hékmé*, 9.

141. Sabri, *Toward a New Alphabet*, 4.

142. Sabri, *Toward a New Alphabet*, 4.

143. This takes into account the morphological instability of most Arabic letters (which could change sharply in shape depending on whether they fall in independent, initial, medial, or final positions, and depending on whether they are connector letters, nonconnector letters, one-way connectors, or two-way connectors).

144. See Fehmi Pasha's proposal to the Fouad I SLA conference, in *Al-Mashreq*.

145. Akl, *Interview.* Akl actually uses this Balzacian image to argue both against the Arabic language, and the Arabic script. In the first instance he compared trying to speak a "dead language" such as Arabic or Latin, to wearing a neck collar. He then quoted Balzac's "lorsqu'on parle une langue morte, c'est comme si l'on

mettait a son intelligence un carcan." In the second instance, he simply rearranged Balzac's image to fit it to the Arabic script.

146. Nagib Jamaleddine, "Dinamiyyat al-Qawmiyya al-Lubnaniyya, Hadiran wa Mustaqbalan" [The Dynamism of the Lebanese Nation: Present and Future], in *Les Dimensions du Nationalisme Libanais*, 121.

147. Jamaleddine, "The Dynamism," 121.

148. Jamaleddine, "The Dynamism," 127.

149. Jamaleddine, "The Dynamism," 121–22.

150. Jamaleddine, "The Dynamism," 123.

151. Jamaleddine, "The Dynamism," 129.

152. Jamaleddine, "The Dynamism," 128.

Conclusion

History is the most dangerous outcome that the chemistry of the intellect has ever elaborated. Its properties are well known. It creates mental images, it intoxicates peoples, it provides them with false memories, it exaggerates their reflexes, it sustains their old wounds, it torments their peace, it drives them into the ecstasy of grandeur or persecution, and it renders nations bitter, magnificent, obnoxious, and conceited.

History justifies whatever we instruct her to justify. Strictly speaking, it teaches us nothing, because it embodies everything, and it provides models of everything.

Paul Valéry[1]

Nineteenth-century German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer said that, "all truth passes through three stages. First, it is ridiculed. Second, it is violently opposed. Third, it is accepted as being self-evident." During the past eighty years of modern Lebanon's life, the ideas emitted by Saïd Akl seemed to have burnt through the stages of Schopenhauer's gamut, back and forth, many times over. Certainly, today, the Lebanese national ideas advocated by Saïd Akl remain a significant cultural strain in Lebanon; they are internalized as undeniable truth by a sizeable segment of Lebanese society; they are also maligned and regarded as faulty and divisive by an equally significant number of opponents. This will perhaps always remain the case, as Lebanon, to Saïd Akl's chagrin, shall also always remain—like the Middle East itself—a land of contrasts and contradictions, and a patchwork of ethnoreligious, cultural, linguistic, and national associations, each with their own specific perceptions of

themselves, each with their distinct identities and national narratives, and each with their unique political personalities and communal ambitions. To rephrase Schopenhauer's paradigm, the Middle East's diversity, textured cultures, and long and varied histories remain—against great odds today—an undeniable truth that flies in the face of zealous Arabist reductive conformism. This truth has been scorned and ridiculed by the keepers of pan-Arab orthodoxy; it has been met with monstrous brutality and violence by the custodians of al-Husri and Aflaq's Arab nationalist canon yet this diversity and this textured pluralism remain the Middle East's staple and only truth, and the only attribute that faithfully defines and describes the region.

The case for Lebanon, and more specifically the Lebanonist national idea, was examined in this work, not because Lebanon is a unique and peculiar specimen of Middle Eastern particularism. Lebanon is perhaps one of the most visible and salient archetypes of diversity in the region. But ultimately, all Middle Eastern countries—especially in the Levant area—are cultural stews in their own rights, with their own unique ethnoreligious, linguistic, and national specificities. All Middle Eastern—and namely all Levantine—nation-states are heterogeneous conglomerations of communities and cultural entities that have always challenged the outmoded discourse of Arabism and Arab nationalism—which still insists on reducing the region to comforting and soothing monistic labels. Lebanon and Lebanonism were chosen as a case study, not because of their successful accomplishments in multicultural coexistence, but because the Lebanese have always been the region's pioneers, testing new ideas, charting alternate directions, and pushing toward untouched frontiers, away from convention and orthodoxy, always in search of accommodation, adaptation, and broader humanistic conversations on Middle Eastern identities.

In 1988, Kamal Salibi argued that Lebanon, like its Middle Eastern neighborhood, was anatomically and incurably a diverse, plural, and complex confessional ethnic conundrum. He wrote that "being the very nature of Lebanese society," Lebanon's entrenched ethnoreligious particularism and its confessional system of power-sharing cannot be dismantled, neither legally nor politically, with neither hook, nor crook.[2] If "thrown out by the door, [Lebanon's confessionalism] could always come in again by the window."[3] According to this view, only through the complete integration of Lebanese society and through the creation of a cohesive Lebanese identity could Lebanon acquire a coherent political and cultural personality outside its primordial confessional identities.[4] Saïd Akl's Lebanonism claimed to contain those ingredients necessary to national cohesion and unity, within a secular framework. Thus, Lebanonism argued that Lebanon already benefited from a coherent national identity, and a sui generis national culture capable of bringing about

genuine Lebanese national integration. Through Lebanonism's distinct national ideals, incarnated in a millennial national history, and transmitted through the vector of a cherished national language, Akl believed that he could blur the lines of Lebanon's confessional and cultural divisions. He was persuaded that only his heteroclite Lebanonism could reveal the "Lebanese nation" to itself and sap the power from under those traditional Lebanese political parties, which derived their constituencies from a confessionalism and a sectarianism that were their own creation.[5] Lebanon was a complete nation, he argued, not an association of ethnicities and confessions, as some "corrupt self-serving politicians" would have one believe.[6] Thus, Saïd Akl set out to demonstrate the authenticity of his Lebanese nation through the nimbus of a timeless "Lebanese" language. Not that Lebanon needed to show proof of its self-evident authenticity (in Akl's view), and not that the "Lebanese" language was the only evidence of that authenticity. But a codified Lebanese national language was certainly a powerful and discernible psychological symbol.

As with all of Saïd Akl's enterprises, whether in politics, poetry, linguistics, or history, reactions to his ideas were never linear, and never predictable. They were rather abrupt, jagged, and disordered. Consequently, although Lebanonism today might still be passing through Schopenhauer's "violent opposition" cycle, it is also being "ridiculed," especially in the circles that also "violently opposed" it.[7] Yet, in spite of the mockery and the virulent opposition, Lebanonism remains a significant cultural phenomenon and its symbols and features continue to seep into the Lebanese national collective consciousness. It is not unusual to hear Lebanese natives today, casually conversing in a French and English-peppered Lebanese dialect, make reference to their language as a bona fide Lebanese language; a seemingly innocent—perhaps even trivial—utterance, but a resounding victory for Saïd Akl and his group, to whom the semantics referring to the "Lebanese language" as such are more powerful and more effective than the most comprehensive of linguistic policies.[8]

The simple fact that the Lebanese identity is still a matter for discussion and a subject of contention, confirms the importance of Lebanonism in Lebanon's cultural debate today. The simple fact that a large Lebanese component still spurns Lebanon's Lebanonist specificity and labors to erase it from collective memories and dissolve it into the neighborhood's Arabness, is indeed a confirmation of Lebanonism's vitality and weight. The simple fact that the Maronite Patriarchal Synod of 2003 had, for the first time since the yearly meetings were inaugurated in 1736, acquiesced in the Maronite's putative Arabness—perfunctory as that acquiescence might have been—is proof that rival currents to define the Lebanese identity are still vying for relevance—and that an insecure and suspicious Arabism still lusts for assurances and confidence-boosting measures. The

fact that the most widely watched Arabic-language television network in the Middle East, *Al-Jazeera*, still organizes panel discussions to look into the future of the Arabic language, to try to suggest solutions to its fragmentation, and to denounce those it holds responsible for that fragmentation—namely the Lebanese—lends further credence to the significance of linguistic Lebanonism and to the anxieties that it stirs up among conformists and Arabists.

Though Akl's ideas might still be ridiculed by some, the best response in his detractors' arsenal seems to be the Arabist mantra that the Phoenicians were a breed of ancient Arabs who spurted out of the Arabian Peninsula in waves, since time immemorial, and had Arabized Lebanon long before the seventh-century Arab conquest.[9] Another dismissal of Saïd Akl's and the Lebanonists' claims to Lebanese specificity is a linguistic counterclaim affirming that his "Lebanese language" is nothing more than an inferior Arabic colloquial, regardless of the semantic and linguistic gymnastics that Akl himself might employ to obfuscate that reality.[10] Even the Syriac and Canaanite-Phoenician languages, to which Saïd Akl has always attempted to link the Lebanese vernacular, are also dismissed as variants of the Arabic language.[11] And since Saïd Akl spares no opportunity to respond to, and attempt to debunk the arguments of his detractors (regardless of how flimsy they might be) the latter often end up resorting to ad hominem scatology to smite "the perverse, dastardly, emasculated, half-witted, barren, old, conceited, senile windbag [for] attempting to isolate Lebanon from its Arab environment."[12] These are actual epithets used by the (tolerant) wardens of Arabism against Saïd Akl, hardly the kind of indignation one would waste on an irrelevant person or ideas such as those of a "defeated poet."[13]

Nevertheless, Akl remains undaunted in his efforts. He is still a fixture on national television networks and radio broadcasts throughout Lebanon. His prestigious Prix Saïd Akl, still a coveted literary honor and a Lebanese national institution as it were, has evolved from being a monthly $1,000 award in 1962, to becoming a weekly $1,000 "scholarship" awarded to anyone, Lebanese or foreign, whose work "glorifies and honors Lebanon." Saïd Akl's public lectures still fill auditoriums to capacity. For a poet—and there is no paucity of poets in the Middle East, many of whom have a hard time eking out a living from their trade—Saïd Akl still earns a decent living, receiving substantial royalties from the sales of his books, which allow him to meet his own financial needs, and his obligations toward the recipients of his weekly awards.[14] His literary and political writings are still prized, fought over, and handsomely remunerated by various Lebanese journals of opinion, newspapers, and periodicals.[15]

As mentioned throughout this work, Akl had a keen understanding of sociocultural assumptions and political pressures that affect the way in

which language specialists and users of certain languages perceive and represent the speech forms in question. In the case of Lebanon's spoken "dialect," Akl argued that it was due to "Arabizing" political pressures that Lebanon's spoken idiom had come to be labeled an Arabic colloquial. This faulty characterization, in his view, got institutionalized and codified in school curricula and educational systems, as well as in mainstream linguistic postulates. His movement simply attempted to destabilize the vertical dimension through which language was being approached in Lebanon (and in the Middle East in general).[16]

In treating the issue of diglossia, John Eisele has argued that the "process of objectification" and conventional classification of language is one such human impulse that represents a view of the world in terms of "object construction" based on presuppositions, assumptions, and political pressures.[17] Saïd Akl advanced a similar claim asserting that humans essentially perceived their surroundings by way of imputed constructs and representations. Consequently, Akl argued that the so-called true language in the Middle East, the one that was arbitrarily deemed worthy of that appellation, became the arcane unspoken MSA, instead of the natural but stigmatized natively spoken "dialects." In Akl's view, this was an oversimplification that sought to situate the complicated Arabic linguistic situation in relation to other languages, as a marker of ethnicity, culture, religion, and politics. Saïd Akl argued that this was a flawed concept that necessitated deconstruction.

In a sense, the language situation in premodern Europe (which Saïd Akl often used as a reference) was very similar to the one in today's Middle East. The written arcane literate tradition (Latin) reigned supreme and had a better reputation than the stigmatized dialectal variances (romance languages, or *vulgaris*, as Dante named them.) Today, however, in modern European linguistic discourse, the tendency is rather toward language variation and dialectalization rather than "unity" and "purity," as remains the case in the Middle East.[18]

In this sense, Saïd Akl was a modernist and an innovator in his struggle to valorize the spoken languages over the politically (but unspoken) dominant MSA. Like European modernists before him, he considered living languages to be the spoken dialects, not the written standards.[19] Today, relying heavily on Akl's Lebanonist doctrines, a considerable segment of the Lebanese not only consider themselves non-Arabs,[20] they even refuse to be labeled "native speakers of Arabic" as they are simply "native users of Arabic" and "native speakers of Lebanese."[21] In this same vein, today many Lebanese, intellectuals and lay people alike, are increasingly and readily willing to conceive of their collective Lebanese *koine* as an outcome of the wave theory as opposed to the family-tree theory favored by traditional Arabic linguists.[22] According to the wave theory, which is in essence a

horizontal perspective on language, the high mutual-comprehensibility between two or more neighboring languages or dialects is not necessarily the result of a certain genetic linguistic kinship—which previously held that the Lebanese vernacular was a progeny of Arabic—but rather the result of linguistic blending, fusion, and evolution, surging like waves over a certain speech area.[23] This is an argument that a number of Lebanese—among them Akl and his cohorts—use today to explain away the similarities between their spoken language and MSA.

Fouad Ephrem-Boustany was among the first and most eloquent proponents of Saïd Akl's theories, both popularizing and intellectualizing the conception of a distinct "Lebanese language." This normalization and mainstreaming of a seemingly absurd theory at least planted the seed of doubt, discrediting, in essence, the "orthodox" evidence that saw the Lebanese vernacular as a dialect of Arabic. In support of Akl's claims, Ephrem-Boustany argued that the Phoenician language was still spoken by the Lebanese today, with certain variations.[24] The contacts that the Phoenician [Lebanese] language has undergone with other neighboring and conquering Semitic languages have forced it to sustain slight changes, according to Ephrem-Boustany.[25] Nevertheless, these contacts and transformations have not caused the Phoenician language to disappear. Indeed, in Ephrem-Boustany's view, the modern Lebanese vernacular is still imbued with specifically Canaanite and Aramaic phonological, syntactic, and lexical attributes, that do not even exist in the Arabic language.[26] In fact, he claimed that the Arabic language, which began making inroads into Lebanon only with the advent of Islam, "has only had a superficial influence on the lexicon of the Lebanese language, the syntax of which has [also] remained Aramaeo-Canaanite."[27]

It would be fastidious to reproduce Fouad Ephrem-Boustany's transcription and transliteration of Ugaritic excerpts illustrating his claims, but it should be noted that not very many Lebanese remain unfamiliar with Ephrem-Boustany's allegations today, and even fewer would venture to challenge them. Indeed, from 1953 to 1980, Fouad Ephrem-Boustany was rector of the Lebanese University, Lebanon's only public university and its only "academic" disseminator of "official" history. He was also author of the first Arabic encyclopedia and various works of reference cataloguing the Aramaeo-Cannanite etymology of common Lebanese words and idiomatic expressions.[28] His role in intellectualizing Akl's ideas began in the mid-1950s, with the establishment of the Mar-Ephrem University (and later with the founding of the Lebanese Academy).

De La Phénicie, a Joseph Chami 1967 study on the Phoenicians, dedicated an entire chapter on the "Lebanese Language."[29] Prefaced by the Emir Maurice Chehab, former General Director of Lebanon's Bureau

of Antiquities and Curator of the Lebanese National Museum, Chami's study hardly comes across as unorthodox or nonconforming to the mentioned "official" version of Lebanese history. Indeed, the book begins with the following epigram:

> Once upon a time, in the history of great civilizations, there was a little country named Phoenicia . . . and it became Lebanon. In the following pages, we shall, together, discover the prestigious past of our country. And we shall proceed with our discoveries, akin to a Phoenician ship braving the storms, in search of new horizons![30]

Perhaps most significant about Chami's book was chapter 11, entitled "The Lebanese Language, 3,500 Years Ago."[31] In it, Chami restated Akl's claims to the Phoenician lineage of the Lebanese vernacular, portrayed it in an engaging linguistic (scientific) argument—relying primarily on Ugaritic literature and the works of Charles Virolleaud[32]—and more significantly, called it a "Lebanese Language." Indeed, Chami, like Ephrem-Boustany, claimed that the "national language of Ugarit [was] still spoken in Lebanon" today.[33] And he set out to demonstrate the alleged continuity between Phoenician and the modern Lebanese vernacular through a pageantry of quintessential Aklian arguments.

In the year 2001, in an article published in the French-language Lebanese daily *L'Orient Le Jour*, Hareth Boustany, current Curator of the Beirut National Museum, and son of Fouad Ephrem-Boustany, described the language situation in Lebanon as follows:

> If racial tensions are well nigh non-extant in Lebanon today, one can certainly notice that the country is also spared the slightest linguistic conflict. This country, which since the remotest antiquity, and for a period exceeding two thousand years, has spoken Canaanite or Phoenician—a distinctive emblem of its national particularism—has subsequently adopted Aramaic or Syriac as its national language. [. . .] In these parts, one could always notice that alongside Lebanon's native local language, there had always been one or two additional foreign languages. This has always constituted an inestimable national capital for the Lebanese people as a whole, as well as for the individual. Furthermore, Lebanon, having been favored by nature and geography in its position at the crossroads of international highways, had always made use of several foreign languages, in addition to its own native language. As attested by the remains of an ancient school at Byblos, the [Lebanese] pupils around the year 2,300 B.C. were required to learn Akkadian alongside their local, Phoenician language. Other archaeological testimonies attest to the fact that even the Egyptian language had also been comprehensible among the inhabitants of Lebanon during antiquity. Later on, when this country adopted Aramaic, or Syriac, both Greek and Latin were also added

> as complementary languages. Today, in addition to their national language, the Lebanese people speak French and English, and to some extent Spanish and Italian, in addition to Turkish and Armenian.[34]

The insinuations in this seemingly innocuous article would have passed unnoticed were it not for the atmosphere of cultural suppression in which Lebanon was foundering at the time of the essay's publication. Indeed, cultural evasiveness and the erasure of the 1975 War (and its root causes) from the Lebanese collective memory have become the only socially and politically acceptable norm in Lebanon of the twenty-first century. In fact, a form of revisionist repression of Lebanon's pre-1975 "official history" is setting in, and a new "memory" favoring the Arab Muslim narrative of Lebanese history is being imbedded in the national psyche.[35] Therefore, the smallest hint to a nonconformist, non-Arab, Lebanese particularism today, is apt to earn its propagator the favored Arabist epithets of "Zionist," "Isolationist," "Sectarianist," "Reactionary," "Subverter," or perhaps worse, it could lead to imprisonment, banishment, or worse still.

Nevertheless, the Boustany article above exuded Aklian Lebanonism, and is a sign of the bold sporadic forays of a certain Lebanese cultural particularism that is still occasionally showcased on the Lebanese cultural and political scenes today. This can only be testimony to the fact that, in spite of the controlled political and cultural atmosphere in which the Lebanese are currently living, intellectual Lebanonism is still culturally relevant, still flourishes, and still attempts stalwart incursions into mainstream Lebanese media. What was remarkable in the article above was its ability to parade the languages that were spoken in Lebanon, through the ages, without ever hinting to the presence or significance of the Arabic language.[36] Furthermore, wherever the reader suspected the author coming to the brink of mentioning the Arabic language, Boustany resisted and referred to a "national," a "local," or a "native" language instead. Thus, the Arabic language was never implicitly or explicitly mentioned as the presumed "national language" of Lebanon. What's more, all references to an indigenous Lebanese language were used in close proximity to, and almost tautologically with, the Phoenician language, so as to conflate, in the reader's perception, "Phoenician" with "Lebanese," "Native," "Local," and "National." Furthermore, the evidently insolent references to the "Canaanite Phoenician" language as a distinguishing symbol of Lebanon's national specificity[37] go a long way in a subdued national culture, still sensitive to these occasional outbursts of cherished (Phoenician) memories. The impulse to write in the manner in which Hareth Boustany showcased his article could only mean that the author was either foolhardy, or else confident in his audience's sympathy and receptivity to his "national" references.

In a 1996 Lebanese Broadcasting Company (LBC) televised interview with Saïd Akl, a panel of three interviewers representing the vying currents defining Lebanese identity subjected the poet to a relentless cross-examination. The show's host and moderator, Gisèle Khoury, though obviously sympathetic to Akl's ideas and attuned to his linguistic theories, was compelled to exhibit an affected contempt for her guest and took repeated gibes at him so as to feign journalistic impartiality, and give her colleagues evidence that she would not succumb to the "old man's" gravitas and charm—or delusions. A Christian-Lebanese journalist (Joseph Daaybis) followed suit as if to pay lip service to the dissenters, but again, was neither convincing nor capable of debunking Akl's theories. The third journalist, a Lebanese-Shi'ite, perhaps the most forthright of the three, was clearly at odds with Akl on several points. Nevertheless, he was visibly smitten by the poet's charisma and the topic of his talk that evening. Still, he could not help asking him, tauntingly, if he were not disturbed by how plebeian Lebanon was defiling the name of his heroine Elissar (along with other mythical Phoenician personalities) by vulgarizing them in such contexts as "Restaurant Elissar," "Elissar Icecream," "Projet Hanibaal," and so on.[38] Saïd Akl eluded the question . . . but he might as well have answered it. The vulgarization of Lebanonist Phoenician references does not necessarily demean those symbols. To the contrary, it popularizes them and makes them part of the collective consciousness of a people.

Linguistic Lebanonism, although not imposed through any coherent official policy, is clearly gaining adherents and proponents in Lebanon, if only by the sheer numbers of those using the Lebanese vernacular in writing, in the media, in advertisement, film, theatre, and song.[39] Even in the traditional Arabic-language Lebanese print media, Saïd Akl's disciples are ubiquitous and quite daring in their interlacing of conventional journalistic MSA with distinctively Lebanese prosody, phraseology, syntax, and semantics.[40] Akl's opponents might indeed be cognizant of the subversive effects of the Lebanonist phenomenon.[41]

Lebanon is indeed a land of extremes, contrasts, and contradictions. Even under Syrian control and in an atmosphere of tight political, cultural, and intellectual suppression, Lebanon could still boast a space for freedom, even for "subversive" ideas such as Saïd Akl's. In June of 2000, as I was wading through throngs of travelers at the Beirut International Airport, on my way back to the United States, I could not help but marvel at the profound sense of bewilderment that a first time visitor to Lebanon must experience. Even I, a Lebanese old hand—as I'd like to think of myself—felt isolated in the midst of "my own people." Soon, I was standing in an endless human chain leading up to the *Sûreté Générale* staging point (Lebanon's equivalent of the United States' Customs and Immigration).

Only, in Lebanon, one has to go through the *Sûreté Générale* both, upon entering and exiting the country. I had my American Passport and my Lebanese national ID in hand, ready for the scrutinizing gawky-eyed inspectors with cocked M-16 automatic rifles at the end of the line. Their glares were so fearsome and intense, I felt almost certain they were intent on not letting any terrorists out of Lebanon on that particular day. "Why do customs and immigration agents always have to look so sinister," I kept wondering as I inched closer to their menacing mustaches? "Shouldn't they be happy so many of us were leaving already?" "Are they required to take courses in 'The Principles of Frowning' at the Police Academy," I wondered? Soon I was in for the treat of my life!

As I got closer to the metal detectors, the only remaining milestone separating me from my outbound Alitalia flight, the almost naked female silhouettes in the distance, whom everyone in my line had been commenting on for some time, began coming into focus. Mind you, there are no deserts in Lebanon, and mirages weren't illusions that your average Lebanese were accustomed to. So I knew that the cambered frolicking vixens in the distance, next to the ogling supervirile mustached *Sûreté* officers, could not have been an optical illusion. They were real all right! Three very blond, very skimpily dressed, very giggly young Lebanese girls (with more "plastic" under their bare flesh than your average American credit-card holder) were being "momentarily detained" by the *Sûreté* (for kicks, or for security reasons), and were trying to flirt their way forward to their Gate. They were soon let go. Reluctantly, it seemed!

This surreal spectacle would not have been much of a shock were it not for the walking *burkas* shuffling in the line next to me. Three doleful, shapeless, overwrapped, overheated women, in the security line on my right, would have gone unnoticed were it not for their contrasting compatriots to my left. They, too, eventually ended up making the metal detector! But unlike their "blond" counterparts, they did so uneventfully, hidden, quietly. All six women were Lebanese! All six of them were probably in their early 20s! And all of them were likely products of the Lebanese War of 1975. Yet all six were worlds apart, as if brought up in separate universes! But I guess that's what one can expect from a complex, richly textured culture reeling out of two decades of wars, chaos, and restraints! Some of us go off, others retreat into our shells. As a native of Lebanon, I was perhaps conditioned to take in these contrasts as second nature, regardless of their obvious eccentricity. Still, this spectacle left me mystified! But I was quickly resigned to its inevitability and its naturalness. This is Lebanon, "*Ecce Libanus!*" as Saïd Akl might have said. Defiance and contradiction are indeed etched in this country's people and in their ideas, as they indelibly define its landscape. Soon I was at my Alitalia gate, with almost two hours to spare before my plane's scheduled depar-

ture. "More than enough time" I thought "to poke through my terminal's bookstores; my favorite airport pass-time."

Airports, and airport bookstores in particular, are arguably a country's most accurate cultural barometer. They are usually the first-time visitors' first encounter with their host country and its people. They are also the last impression of a country that a first-time visitor takes away with her before departing. France's airport bookstores usually abound with *Astérix* comic books, and other brainier products of the French national genius, ranging from DuBellay, to Victor Hugo, to Voltaire, to Beaudlaire, and off to more risqué younger authors like Frédéric Dard. In America, the weary traveler is usually exposed to a more variegated literature, ranging from *New York Times* best-sellers, to more quaint American classics, and finally, again, to a racy roster of Danielle Steels and Steven Kings. In Lebanon, I thought, the Beirut International Airport would try to project a comparable, authentic, national image, reflecting the views of the dominant powers and the ideas of the times. Syria, Arabism, the Arabness of Lebanon, and the "defeat of Saïd Akl and his ilk's isolationist ideas," were more along the lines of the topics I expected to take away with me onboard.[42] To my puzzlement, I was wrong! There were no such books!

Soon, I found myself gawking at Youssef al-Sawda's *Pour le Liban*; Charles Corm's *La montagne inspirée*; mint condition, leather-bound volumes of all four issues of the mythical *La revue Phénicienne*; the entire collection of Michel Chiha's political writings; Philip Hitti's *Lebanon in History*; Saïd Akl's latest (1999) colloquial Lebanese works *Missa Solemnis* and *'Ashtarim*,[43] in addition to a seven-volume collection of all his poetry and prose. There were also a number of attractive coffee-table volumes on Phoenicia and the history of the Phoenicians. But most importantly, I came across Ernest Renan's priceless out-of-print *Mission de Phénicie*.[44] To my knowledge, besides Saïd Akl's recent "Lebanese" works, all of the displayed titles, which were by no means considered hostile to the Lebanonist conception of Lebanon—as a sui generis Lebanese nation, speaking a sui generis Lebanese language—had long since gone out of print. Yet the Lebanese government seemed to not only tolerate their republication but also seemed to favor their dissemination and sale at the country's national airport; the main hub where visitors sample their first and last tastings of Lebanon's dominant ideas.

Was Lebanonism then truly a spent force in Lebanon? Was Saïd Akl truly a defeated poet? Is the Middle East tending toward monolithic orthodoxy? If the answers to any of these questions were yes, then my Beirut International Airport experience was all a mirage, and Lebanon was hardly an oasis and a crossroads as its national ideologues have been painting it for the past one hundred years. Still, the Saïd Akl phenomenon

and the relatively subdued Lebanese popular culture of today do not seem to bear out such a bleak conclusion. Lebanonism as a heteroclite pantheist integrative cultural phenomenon is still very much vibrant and dynamic in Lebanon today, regardless of whether or not the majority of its practitioners partake of it openly. They still seem to do so impulsively. And the rest of the Middle East is part of that natural impulse.

NOTES

1. Paul Valéry, *Regards sur le Monde Actuel, et Autres Essais* (Paris: Flammarion, 1945), 35.
2. Salibi, *A House of Many Mansions*, 194.
3. Salibi, *A House of Many Mansions*, 194.
4. Salibi, *A House of Many Mansions*, 194.
5. See Akl's "Dilemmas and Strengths," in *Les Années "Cénacle,"* 264.
6. Akl, "Lebnan 'Emmi Metkamli" (Lebanon Is a Complete Nation), in *Lebnaan*, Volume XI, Number 507 (Beirut, Friday, February 7, 1986), 4.
7. Even some proponents of linguistic Lebanonism feel sometimes intimidated into mocking Saïd Akl's claims.
8. See Alameddine's *The Hakawati*'s multiple references to a "Lebanese language."
9. Joel Carmichael has argued that the idea of Arabs or proto-Arabs "bursting out of the Arabian Peninsula over whole millennia and establishing civilizations on the borderlands north of the Peninsula is mere theory. It is based on no records at all and is, in fact, modeled on the historic eruption of the Arabs [. . . with the advent of Islam] in the seventh century and then retrojected to fit an unknown situation." See *The Shaping of the Arabs* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1967), 5.
10. Abdallah Bin Muhammad al-Shaheel, "Rihlat Saïd Akl Min al-Fus-ha Ila al-Aamiyya" (Saïd Akl's Journey from MSA to Vernacular) in *Al-Watan* (Riyad, Monday, August 26, 2002).
11. Al-Shaheel, "Saïd Akl's Journey."
12. For a pageantry of more colorful and creative slurs directed at Saïd Akl, see Al-Shaheel, "Saïd Akl's Journey."
13. Abbas Serhan, "Bayumi Qandeel's Lies and Deceptions," in *Diwan al-Arab*, www.diwanalarab.com/imprimersans.php3?id_article=896 (March 2004).
14. He claims that one-third of his yearly income comes from the continued popularity of his *Lebanon If It Spoke*, which by 1991 had gone into its sixth printing (and into its ninth by the year 2000).
15. The Arab nationalist organ *As-Safeer* was reportedly paying Saïd Akl $5,000 per week, in return for two very short weekly articles—appropriately titled "Bi Kalimaat" (In a few Words)—which he generally dictated over the telephone.
16. This vertical outlook simply viewed the Arabic language as a uniform speech community benefiting from a number of registers. These so-called registers were arranged on the same totem pole: on top was an arcane but prestige literary language, never spoken, but revered and depicted as an object of affec-

tion (and one day perhaps a national integrator of the Arabs). Below the arcane-prestige MSA on that same totem pole were a number of vibrant, dynamic, but stigmatized speech forms, often devalued as a mere dialects.

17. John C. Eisele, "Approaching Diglossia: Authorities, Values, and Representations," in Aleya Rouchdy (ed.) *Language Contact and Language Conflict in Arabic: Variations on a Sociolinguistic Theme*, 4.

18. Eisele, 8–9.

19. Eisele, 10.

20. Speetjens, "I am Phoenician."

21. This phenomenon is especially predominant on internet sites geared toward promoting and teaching the "Lebanese language." For more on the rhetoric of distinction between "native speakers" and "native users" of Arabic, see Dilworth Parkinson's "Knowing Standard Arabic: Testing Egyptians' MSA Abilities," in *Perspectives on Arabic Linguistics V* ed. by M. Eid and C. Holes (Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Co., 1993).

22. See for example L. Bloomfield, *Language* (New York, 1933), 317, quoted in Joshua Blau's *The Emergence and Linguistic Background of Judaeo-Arabic,* third revised edition (Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute, 1999), 15.

23. Joshua Blau, *The Emergence and Linguistic Background of Judaeo-Arabic*, 15.

24. Fouad Ephrem-Boustany, *Studia Libanica*, 69–70.

25. Ephrem-Boustany, *Studia Libanica*, 69–70.

26. Ephrem-Boustany, *Studia Libanica*, 69–70.

27. See the interview with Fouad Ephrem-Boustany in *L'Orient*, January 18, 1965.

28. For a sample of Ephrem-Boustany's index of "Lebanese words of Phoenician origins," see *Studia Libanica*, 73–84.

29. Joseph Chami, *De La Phénicie* (Beirut, Lebanon: Librairie du Liban, 1967), 103–9.

30. Chami, *De la Phénicie*, ix.

31. Chami, *De la Phénicie*, 103.

32. See Charles Virolleaud, *La légende Phénicienne de Danel* (Paris: Librairie Orientaliste Paul Geuthner, 1936), 105.

33. Virolleaud, *La légende*, 105.

34. Hareth Boustany, "La vie culturelle et artistique au Liban," in *L'Orient Le Jour* (Beirut, August 16, 2001).

35. See the BBC News story *History Lesson Stymied in Lebanon*, Wed., 8 April, 2009. news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/7988399.stm.

36. This excerpt is taken from a section of the article entitled "Le milieu linguistique Libanais" (The Lebanese Linguistic Milieu). However, Hareth Boustany does in fact mention the "Arabic Language" by name in an earlier section entitled "La Renaissaince (Nahda)." However, Arabic is mentioned simply in the context of Lebanon's contributions to the Arabic language's literary patrimony—similar to its contributions to countless other languages—not in any national or political context. Never, throughout the article, does Boustany allude to a possible national significance of the Arabic language. "Canaanite Phoenician" however, is openly admitted as the "distinctive emblem of [Lebanon's] national particularism."

37. Boustany, "La Vie Culturelle."

38. References were made to restaurants, ice-cream parlors, and urban development projects sporting the names of Akl's Phoenician heroes.

39. For more on the vulgarization/popularization of the "Lebanese language" in the media, see Mahmoud Al-Batal's "Identity and Language Tension in Lebanon: The Arabic of Local News at LBCI," in Aleya Rouchdy's *Language Contact and Language Conflict in Arabic: Variations on a Sociolinguistic Theme*, 91–115.

40. See for instance the much vaunted weekly opinion columns of Jebran Tueini in Lebanon's largest Arabic-language daily *An-Nahar*.

41. See for instance Abbas Serhan's "Bayumi Qandeel's Lies and Deceptions," in *Diwan al-Arab*.

42. "The defeated poet" is one of the expressions used by *Diwan al-Arab*'s Abbas Serhan in reference to Saïd Akl. In a recent article denouncing the founding of a new Egyptian political party, which claims that "the Egyptian colloquial is an Egyptian language, not an Arabic dialect," Serhan pits the blame for this new Egyptian subversion on Saïd Akl. He considers Akl "a dark blotch on the history of Arabic poetry" (see note 9 for more detail). In another article from the *Riyadh Daily Newspaper*, dated Saturday, September 27, 2003, Jihad Fadel dismissed Saïd Akl and his "Lebanese project, which is based on the idea that Lebanon is a separate nation and nationality, and not a component of the Arab nation and nationality." Fadel also condemned Akl for having dared use the traditional Arabic "Qasida [poem] to advance notions and an ideology that negate all that which is Arabic."

43. *Missa Solemnis* was essentially the Maronite Mass in verse, written in the Aklian characters, using dialectal Lebanese and liturgical Syriac. Significantly, "the Lord's Prayer" and "Hail Mary," which after the *aggiornamento* of Vatican II began being recited in Literary Arabic in Maronite churches, were presented in dialectal form in Akl's *Missa Solemnis*.

44. I ended up purchasing *Mission de Phénicie* at the bargain price of $80. This was a facsimile copy published in 1998, following a limited edition (of 1,348 copies) in 1997, which had gone out of print. Earlier that May, I was able to find a used copy of the original *Mission* at a Paris "bouquiniste" store. It was priced at $8,000.

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